

When the Slipper Doesn't Fit:  
Subversion, Irony, and Feminism in Anne Thackeray Ritchie's Fairy Tales

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Thesis

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## Introduction

*“Fairy times, gifts, music and dances are said to be over, or, as it has been said, they come to us so disguised and made familiar by habit that they do not seem to us strange”*

– Anne Thackeray Ritchie, “Beauty and the Beast”

Born in 1837 and dying in 1919, Anne Thackeray Ritchie lived a long life that fully included the Victorian era. Victorian Britain was a place of flourishing development: the society was changing due to the introduction of new technologies, a growing industrial economy, and the expansion of a global British Empire. In the literary world, fairy tales experienced a comeback, with whimsical stories by authors such as Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, and James Barrie finding success and bringing new attention to an often-overlooked genre (Auerbach 1). Fairy tales offer a portal (or a magical looking glass) into the Victorian world, revealing their desires, beliefs, trials, tribulations, and dreams. These stories also illuminate underlying class structures, gender roles, and economic disparities and showcase their authors’ criticisms of the era. As critic and folklorist Michael Newton states: “If we wish to understand the Victorians, we should read their dreams” (Newton xi). Ella Williams-Freeman used to say, “Lady Ritchie lived in dreamland” (Fuller 105-6). For Victorian Britons, fairy tales simultaneously represented worlds unattainable and reflected the world around them. Ritchie expertly blends these elements in tales that criticize Victorian paradigms of gender roles, material culture, and marriage.

Queen Victoria began her sixty-four-year reign on 20 June 1837, the same year Ritchie was born. When Queen Victoria died, most Britons had never seen another monarch on the throne (Hart 121). She reigned over a vastly changing Britain with new technology, scientific discoveries, reform, an expanding empire, and a changing class structure. The population boomed, and people moved into industrial towns and cities as the economic and political value of

land ownership decreased. The economy relied more and more heavily on trade and manufacturing (Reidhead 979). With a growing middle class of *nouveau riche*, industrialists and financiers struggled to find their place in the social order (Atlick 21). The *possibility* for socioeconomic mobility blurred the previously distinct line between the gentry and the middle and working classes. Furthermore, changes in technology revolutionized the British economy. The Great Exhibition of 1851 demonstrated new developments in industry and science. An architectural feat in itself, the Crystal Palace served as the setting for the Exhibition, displaying new technologies as well as “impressive displays from other nations [that] reflected the success of Britain’s new free trade policy” (Atlick 11). Ritchie sets part of her “Cinderella” at the Crystal Palace, illuminating the magical elements of the Exhibition as well as providing a contrast between the comfort of the domestic European fairy tale and new wonders from the imperial colonies.

Ritchie’s life revolved around fairy tales from a young age. Her father, William Makepeace Thackeray, encouraged imagination and fantasy in his daughters’ minds. Thackeray wrote, “I am determined that Annie shall have a very extensive ... store of learning in Tom Thumbs, Jack-the-Giant-Killers. ... What use is there in the paltry store of small facts that are stowed into these poor little creatures’ brains?” (Gérin 15). Thackeray wrote *The Rose and the Ring*, a fairy-tale novella, in 1854 for his daughters and Edith Story, the ailing daughter of his American friends (Gérin 88). During her youth, Ritchie wrote “one short fairy tale” before Thackeray told her to stop writing until she “read other people’s books” (Fuller 87-88). Some of her letters reflect her magical way of looking at the world: in describing her grandparent’s country house from childhood, she writes, “we had a general impression that these hunting companies were about, and any day a gay procession, not unlike something out of a fairy tale,

might come riding past our old gates” (Fuller 37). She published some of her fairy tales under the title *Fairy Tales for Grown Folks* in 1867 (Harries 109) and a year later published *Five Old Friends and a Young Prince*. Ritchie expanding her fairy-tale repertoire with the publication of *Bluebeard’s Keys and Other Stories* in 1874. A few decades later, in 1892, she wrote an introduction to Madame D’Aulnoy’s book of fairy tales (Aplin 113), and her 1908 *Blackstick Papers* features “the wise centenarian Fairy Blackstick” from *The Rose and the Ring* (Auerbach 14). Ritchie was interested in children throughout her life: “in the autumn of 1865 they [Anny and her sister, Minny] adopted the two motherless children of Edward Thackeray, whose wife, ‘the beloved Amy,’ had died in India. The bonds of harmony and intimacy that united Anny to her wards were to last for nearly half a century” (Fuller 118-19). Her first publication, in the 1860 edition of her father’s *Cornhill Magazine*, “Little Scholars,” regarded the situation of underprivileged children in orphanages and charities, expunging upon their struggles and academic pursuits (Ritchie, “Little Scholars”). Most of her work was aimed at an adult audience, however, including *Five Old Friends*. During her life, Ritchie wrote several novels, biographies, and essays, including the *Blackstick Papers*, *Life of Madame de Sévigné*, and introductions and prefaces to the works of William Makepeace Thackeray, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Maria Edgeworth (Gérin 297-98). She was a favorite of George Eliot, who wrote: “it is my rule not to read contemporary fiction. ... I know nothing of our contemporary English novelists with the exception of Miss Thackeray’s and (a few of) Anthony Trollope’s works” (Gérin 163). In 1863, Ritchie published her first novel, *The Story of Elizabeth*, which became highly successful and established her name beyond that of Thackeray’s daughter (Fuller 100). “Anny’s novels struck a new note. She was an innovator, the angle of her approach to fiction had not as yet been explored. She opened wide a door through which a host of women writers were to come” (Fuller

101). Entwined in the social circles of various literary, scholarly, and artistic figures of the era, including the Dickens family, Tennyson, and the Brownings, Ritchie lived surrounded by many intellectually stimulating friends (Gérin vii). Her step-niece, Virginia Woolf described Ritchie in a review of her *Correspondence*:

The most ingrained philistine could not remain bored, though bewildered she might be by Miss Thackeray's charm. For it was a charm extremely difficult to analyse. She said things that no human being could mean and yet she meant them. She lost trains, mixed names, confused numbers, driving up to Town, for example, precisely a week before she was expected, and making Charles Darwin laugh. (Fuller 104-5)

Ritchie's vibrant personality shines through in her writing, and her fairy tales ring with the playful and honest magnetism of their author.

This thesis examines three of Anne Thackeray Ritchie's fairy tales from her book, *Five Old Friends, and a Young Prince*: "Sleeping Beauty," "Cinderella," and "Beauty and the Beast," investigating how she subverts the expectations of the fairy tales to criticize Victorian society and gender roles. The varying levels of agency of the female protagonists of each of these tales form a scale with which to evaluate female figures in fairy tales, from the exceedingly passive Cecilia Lulworth to the more liberated Ella Ashford. Ritchie twists and manipulates these classic tales to create characters that hyperbolize fairy-tale stereotypes, rewriting familiar stories in an ironic fashion. Ritchie subverts the fairy tales subtly in order to weave in her criticism of Victorian England without disrupting the basic form of the story. Intended for an adult audience, *Five Old Friends and a Young Prince* begins with "Sleeping Beauty," followed by "Cinderella" and "Beauty and the Beast." In "Sleeping Beauty," Ritchie parodies the ideal of the passive Victorian woman in Cecilia, a heroine whose lack of desires and agency leaves her at the mercy

of the men in her life. “Beauty and the Beast” features a slightly more agential princess in Belle, whose undesirable “happy ending” critiques the idea of a fairy-tale romance. Finally, in “Cinderella,” Ritchie creates an admirable heroine who pursues her desires and finds the whimsical in the everyday. Observed in this order, each heroine becomes more estimable and powerful than the last, challenging the patriarchal norms of Victorian England. Throughout the tales, Ritchie subverts both the fairy-tale genre and the marriage plot with irony and comically hyperbolized characters. Her fairy tales for adults are amusing and enjoyable while also exposing the superficiality of the patriarchy and material culture in Victorian England.

## Chapter 1: *Sleeping Beauty*

Anne Thackeray Ritchie's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" adapts traditional versions of the tale by centering on a Victorian woman named Cecilia, whose hyperbolized submissiveness exposes problems with the ideal Victorian woman who has no agency in her own life. Irony, comedy, and morally ambiguous characters permeate the story and disrupt the reader's expectations, thus subverting the romance of the tale. "Sleeping Beauty" begins with the narrator's recollection of receiving a book of fairy tales, which evokes nostalgia for her youth. She discusses this with her companion, known only as H., and they begin to sort their acquaintances into categories based on fairy tales. They recount the story of sleeping beauty: Cecilia Lulworth inhabits Dorlicote Hall, a decidedly dreary place, with her mother and father; her mother's companion, Miss Bowley; and her godmother, Mrs. Dormer. Their lives go on monotonously until Cecilia's twenty-fifth year, at which time John Lulworth, Cecilia's uncle, writes a letter to Mrs. Dormer informing her that Dorlicote Hall is, in fact, entailed—meaning that it must go to the eldest male relative, and therefore Cecilia may not inherit it as had previously been assumed. In this tale, Ritchie blends the conventions of the marriage-plot novel with the tropes of the fairy tale, a formulation that pays homage to Jane Austen, on whom she writes an essay four years later in 1871 (Aplin 61). To sort out the matter in a manner pleasing to all, John proposes to send his son, Frank, down to discuss any legal matters and, he hints, to become engaged to young Cecilia. Frank arrives and finds a drowsy estate. After Frank meets his great-aunt, Cecilia enters the room, unaware of the presence of the stranger. To her horror, Frank tries to embrace her at the behest of Mrs. Dormer. Poor Cecilia gasps, blushes, and bursts into tears. After some general confusion amongst the group, in which Frank makes to leave and Mrs. Dormer calls Cecilia an "idiot" not once, but twice (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 23, 24), Cecilia

apologizes for her crying, and Frank apologizes for frightening her. Here Ritchie ends the tale, providing a brief epilogue in which the narrator explains that Cecilia and Frank marry with the approval of all the family, and everyone lives happily ever after. Ritchie's iteration of the *Sleeping Beauty* story utilizes many of the same characters and plot points as earlier versions of the tale. However, by setting it within a historical period and place and ironically parodying the expected tropes, she replaces the fantasy of the castle with the realities of domestic life and challenges the promise of marital bliss as a "happy ending" for the Victorian woman.

The narrative indicates the subversion of the fairy-tale marriage trope through a strong narratorial voice. The story begins with: "A kind enchantress one day put into my hand a mystic volume..." (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 1). This beginning echoes the classic "once upon a time..." structure of fairy tales, such as Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty," which begins: "Once upon a time there was a king and a queen who were quite vexed at not having any children" (Zipes, *Great Fairy Tale Tradition* 688). Ritchie's "one day" is vague and mysterious, yet the slight difference from "once upon a time" places it more firmly within reality by avoiding the exact wording of Perrault's fairy tale. Ritchie thus introduces her frame story. We meet an unnamed narrator—later established as Miss Williamson, a name fitting for the creation of the daughter of William Makepeace Thackeray (Auerbach 13)—who sits with her friend, H., and discusses fairy tales and their acquaintances. The frame story assigns a physical and temporal location to the narrative, which purportedly involves the "real" character of Cecilia. This sets Ritchie's tale apart from other, classical versions and hints to the reader that other tropes of the genre will be subverted. Marina Warner remarks that "fairy tales on the page invoke live voices, telling stories aloud. A memory of a living narrator reverberates in the literary text" (*Once Upon a Time* 53). This is undoubtedly true for Ritchie's tale, in which the narrator's voice holds a strong presence

from the very beginning. The first-person point of view gives the story a level of intimacy one may expect from a fairy tale; it evokes the image of a mother reading to her children or an old woman recounting stories by a fire. Furthering this intimacy, the narrator often addresses the reader; the story ends with, “Some day I may perhaps tell you more about the fairies and enchanting princesses of my acquaintance” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 26). Through the narrator’s active presence in this story, we gain insight into the moral we should take out of it, which seems on first glance to be the necessity of the awakening of the passive woman and her subsequent entrance into matrimony. The narration takes on a playful tone as the narrator experiments with the genre, and the awareness of the writing process contributes to the merging of reality and fantasy in the tale. Ritchie concludes the narrative with a meta-reference: “Fairy tales are never very long, and this one ought to come to an end” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 25). In manipulating the genre in this way, Ritchie opens the door to interpretation and breaks the enchantment of the fairy tale by cutting short the fantastic plot. Upon further inspection—encouraged by the narrator’s ironic and intimate tone—a deeper moral becomes evident: that perhaps marital domesticity is not worth striving for.

The temporal self-awareness of Ritchie’s tale, placed within the Victorian social world and its marriage market, contrasts with the inherently fantastical qualities of the story to encourage the reader to interrogate her own notions of the whimsical. The first sentence of Ritchie’s “Sleeping Beauty” continues with an explanation given by the enchantress: “I am so fond of this book. It has all the dear old fairy tales in it; one never tires of them. Do take it” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 1). The “dear old fairy tales” allude to the nostalgia of the genre; in 1866, fairy tales already held a familiarity that connected readers to the past. Ritchie describes her “old friends” (*Five Old Friends* 1), conveying intimacy in her relation to these well-known

tales. The enchantress also comments on the long-lasting nature of these stories—“one never tires of them”—and the narrator ponders why that statement rings true: “what was it that made these stories so fresh and so vivid. Why did not they fall to pieces, vanish, explode, disappear, like so many of their contemporaries and descendants?” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 1-2). Indeed, many fairy tales did fall out of fashion in the Victorian era, just as certain Victorian fairy tales (“Prince Riquet,” for example) are no longer popular today (Auerbach 3). The moralistic fairy tales of the early Victorian period faded from popularity as more “mystic” stories gained traction (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 1). As Ritchie explains, “realistic stories” (*Five Old Friends* 2)—like Mary Martha Sherwood’s *Little Henry and His Bearer*, published in 1814 (Auerbach 21n)—“passed somewhat out of date ... [while others] seem as if they would never grow old” (*Five Old Friends* 2). Here, she connects the fairy-tale genre with the changing generations of the real world. “The majority of the tales and stories for children were sentimental, moralistic, realistic, and didactic, intended to demonstrate and model manners and morals” (Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick* 85). Ritchie’s tale also intends to impart a moral upon its audience, but that moral differs from the pedagogy of Victorian ideals and instead imparts subtle notions of gender equality on the unsuspecting reader.

Ritchie gives morals to parents reading the tale by denouncing the folly of antiquated methods of childrearing and encouraging a more modern view of childhood in the adults reading the story. The older relatives around Cecilia are fundamentally strict and poised: her mother is “erect and dignified” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 5), and she raised Cecilia with the stern ideals she herself was brought up with.

A great many people think there is nothing in the world so good for children as scoldings, whippings, dark cupboards, and dry bread and water, upon which they expect them to

grow up into tall, fat, cheerful, amiable men and women; and a great many people think that for grown-up young people the silence, the chillness, the monotony and sadness of their own fading twilight days is all that is required. (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 6)

Ritchie's tale aims to teach adults rather than children. A criticism of earlier Victorian child-rearing ideals, Cecilia's story acts as a cautionary tale against too-strict parenting, yet she also provides hope that the slumbering Victorians can also awaken into brighter, livelier states of consciousness. Ritchie's father, William Makepeace Thackeray, also shared this dislike of the strict education of young people and raised his daughters according to different principles: he "had no use for the 'matter-of-fact' systems of education advocated by the Miss Edgeworths of his time, and was all for stimulating the imagination as being vital to the growth of the child's intelligence" (Gérin 15). The narrator outlines this "matter-of-fact" raising of a Victorian child, especially the expectations placed upon young girls to become "accomplished" in many tasks to increase marriageability. "They themselves, when they were little girls, had been slapped, snubbed, locked up in closets, thrust into bed at all sorts of hours, flattened out on blackboards, set on high stools to play the piano for days together, made to hem frills five or six weeks long, and to learn immense pieces of poetry" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 6). With a woman's economic liberty often limited to her success in marriage, raising a child brought particular elements into focus that aimed to increase a young woman's worth in the marriage market. Rather than place blame completely upon the Victorian women educating their daughters, the narrator explains that they "sincerely thought they could not do better" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 7). Ritchie advocates for an "awakening" for parents, not to adhere to the old ways but to embrace more modern notions of childhood and womanhood.

Cecilia Lulworth's life pre-awakening is dull and un-changing, representing the fairy-tale slumber of sleeping beauty and parodying the passivity of the ideal Victorian woman. "Part of the gender norms of Victorian England, were constructed within an ideology of 'separate spheres' — the notion that 'masculine' and 'feminine' spheres were natural and normal, appropriate because women were passive, men active. Women's place, therefore, was in the domestic" (Shea 54). Cecilia's domestic existence is a boring one. The words "monotonous" and "monotony" are repeated throughout the story (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 5, 6), and her days are demarcated by the tolling of a clock and the operation by rote of daily tasks and activities. The language reflects this tedium: "Miss Bowley, walked beside her up and down the dark laurel walk at the back of the house, —up and down, down and up, up and down" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 5). The repetitive fluctuation between the two words recreates the women's movement visually on the page. Cecilia's life works like clockwork, yet she remains free from any sense of ennui. Her house looks like a prison: "One day a young fellow riding by saw rather a sweet woman's face gazing for an instant through the bars, and he went on his way with a momentary thrill of pity" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 4). This "thrill of pity" darkly parodies the expectations of a romantic hero come to rescue the princess; instead of having a thrill of passion upon their union, he pities the slumbering girl but promptly moves on with his life. Trapped, Cecilia cannot escape or awake on her own accord; she needs a prince to rescue her from her slumber. When her prince, Frank Lulworth, finally arrives, he "heard no sounds of life,—he saw no one" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 19). The staff is described as "sleepy," sitting "languidly," and "half-asleep" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 19-20). Even the dog lies asleep until Frank approaches. Here, Ritchie pays homage to a classic version of *Sleeping Beauty* in which the fairy places a sleeping curse upon the entire castle—including its animals—as well as the princess within it (Grimm

169). Rather than a sleep spell, the curse here is one of boredom and a lack of progress or activity. When Frank Lulworth first arrives, “he heard steps far, far away” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 20), repetitive language that makes the manor seem as large as a grand castle. Ironically, Cecilia’s palace entraps her, while earlier versions of the tale depict the castle as safe, secure, and desirable for the princess. The description of the surrounding area also echoes the imagery of other *Sleeping Beauty* renditions: “The laurel branches, all unpruned, untrained, were twisting savagely in and out, wreathing and interlacing one another, clutching tender shootings, wrestling with the young oak-trees and the limes” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 18). In Grimm’s “Briar Rose,” when the curse is cast, “a brier hedge began to grow all around the castle, and it grew higher each year” (Zipes, *Great Fairy Tale Tradition* 697). The untamed wilderness threatens the image of domestic bliss and idleness that Cecilia’s household wishes to embody.

The monotony of the household extends to the princess herself; before her awakening, Cecilia exists within a state of stasis, uninterested in any change or personal growth. Interestingly, Bruno Bettelheim claims that sleeping beauty’s slumber acts as a time for personal growth and maturation, allowing the young girl to grow into a (sexually) mature young woman (225). In a Victorian setting, this maturation would prepare a young woman for marriage; however, Cecilia’s lack of growth subverts that idea and therefore challenges the patriarchal system in which a woman’s main role is that of the potential bride. Despite her education, she never improves: “To-night she banged away very placidly at Rhodes’ air, for the twentieth time breaking down in the same passage and making the same mistake” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 9). Personally, as well as musically, she makes no advancements. In classical versions of *Sleeping Beauty*, the protagonist gains all of the admirable traits of her sex without needing to put in any work. In Perrault’s tale, the princess receives gifts from the good fairies including “that she

should be the most beautiful person in the world,” “have the temperament of an angel,” “evinced the most admirable grace in all she did,” “dance to perfection,” “sing like a nightingale,” and “play every instrument in the most exquisite manner possible (Zipes, *Great Fairy Tale Tradition* 689). Sleeping beauty embodies the ideal traits of a Victorian woman—good tempered, graceful, and accomplished (Rowbotham 16-23)—but Cecilia fails to measure up to her assigned heroine, reflecting the impossibility of actually achieving all of these “gifts” on one’s own. Within the middle and upper class, girls’ education “was devoid of intellectual content, let alone intellectual challenge. It was limited to the polite accomplishments which were calculated to help her first to win a husband and then, after that primary goal was reached, to infuse her household with an air of the softer graces so as to maintain its separation from the gritty world of affairs” (Atlick 54). Cecilia illuminates the shallowness of these “polite accomplishments”; she is pretty, quiet, and can play music tolerably well, and she does not step outside of her assigned sphere nor desires to. Ultimately, she “wins” the desired goal, a husband, despite her silliness and naïveté. Ritchie demonstrates through Cecilia how limiting are the expectations of the upper- or middle-class Victorian woman.

Pre-awakening Cecilia is characterized by absence: the absence of emotion, conviction, or consciousness, a parody of the submissive ideals for her gender. She “looked out vacantly” from the windows of Lulworth Hall (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 4); she is “impassive” and “unconscious” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 21). This contrasts with the heroine of Basile’s tale, who, while “leaning out a window, ... saw an old woman pass by and was surprised to see her spinning” (Zipes, *Great Fairy Tale Tradition* 685). Basile’s sleeping beauty initiates her own fate by pricking her finger on the spinning-wheel; her curiosity ultimately condemns her. In contrast, when Cecilia is first confronted by her prince, she “only turned her great, sleepy,

astonished eyes upon her cousin, and stood perfectly still as if she was one of those beautiful wax-dolls one sees stuck up to be stared at” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 21-22). Incapable of forming her own thoughts or opinions, she is like a doll: lovely and decorative but a puppet of other people’s whims. The objectification of Cecilia is comically devastating. She hyperbolizes the passivity of a “good” woman, suggesting that the Victorian and fairy-tale archetypes should be questioned and doubted. Luckily for Cecilia, her great-aunt acts as fairy godmother, and her prince comes to rescue her. Before these occur, however, she remains in a state of suspension, neither progressing nor regressing but remaining still as she slowly ages:

And so time passed. Cecilia grew up. She had neither friends nor lovers. She was not happy nor unhappy. She could read, but she never cared to open a book. She was quite contented; for she thought Lulworth Hall the finest place, and its inmates the most important people in the world. ... She never thought of anything but the utterest commonplaces and platitudes. (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 9)

Until she is acted upon by outside forces, Cecilia remains satisfied with the life she lives and utterly unaware of its deficiency. She embodies the Victorian ideals for a woman of her class, “respectable and decorous, and a little pompous and overbearing” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 9), and her thoughtless mind makes her a perfect wife: moldable, unimposing, and meager. From this passage, one might ask whether Cecilia *wishes* to wake up— “she was quite contented.” The only mention of an inclination on her part towards awakening occurs when marriage is suddenly brought up at a family meal: “Cecilia, for the first time in all her life, wondered whether she should ever live all her life in this spot,—ever go away?” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 16). She does not ask if she shall marry—she has stated most definitively that she does not wish to—but ponders only the option of exploring beyond the walls of her enchanted castle. By the end of the

story, she does marry and, ironically, remains within her castle; she and Frank take up the family residence, which is graciously offered to them by her godmother. Therefore, Cecilia does not achieve her wish of leaving her home but instead enters a marriage that she had not previously desired. Although she does not perform any action of her own in this tale, a “happy ending” finds Cecilia, as in many other renditions of *Sleeping Beauty*. In Basile’s “Sun, Moon, and Talia,” the story concludes with a moral: “even when asleep / a person can be struck by luck” (Zipes, *Great Fairy Tale Tradition* 688). Perrault’s tale, too, ends this way: “Moral: / To wait so long / And want a man refined and strong / Is not at all uncommon. / And yet to wait one hundred year / Without a tear, without a care, / Makes for a very rare woman” (Zipes, *Great Fairy Tale Tradition* 695). It seems that sleeping beauty’s crowning accomplishment is that she remains passive throughout her curse, never complaining, just as the Victorian woman ought not to complain about her assignment to domestic life. Cecilia certainly does not lament her situation, and yet Ritchie’s tale must be read not as a commendation but rather as a condemnation of this behavior.

The imagery of “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” revolves around color, highlighting the crucial elements of the story for the reader and thus guiding the way to discovering the true moral of the tale: that women should strive for more agency in their life rather than remaining passive. Unlike Perrault’s tales that add a definitive moral to the end of a story, Ritchie instills her morals throughout the tale in subtler and more literary ways. The narrator does this early in the story by categorizing people’s lives in terms of the brightness of its colors:

Some lives are *couleur de rose*, people say; others seem to be, if not *couleur de rose* all through, yet full of bright, beautiful tints, blues, pinks, little bits of harmonious cheerfulness. ... Besides these, there are some which have always appeared to me as if

they were of a dark, dull hue; a dingy, heavy brown, which no happiness, or interest, or bright color could ever enliven. Blues turn sickly, roses seem faded, and yellow lilacs look red and ugly upon these heavy backgrounds. (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 3-4)

The establishment of the metaphor of color reflects the fairy-tale genre's inclination towards explanation, theoretically to appeal to a young audience, although Ritchie's tales are aimed at adults. Tracing the colors of this story illuminates the awakening of Cecilia; we see a hint of her beauty and, thus, her chance to escape the dull life of her family with her cheeks, the "brightest pink, instead of bilious orange" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 10). Cecilia's beauty is her most admirable trait since she has no other talents or personality. In contrast, everything in her vicinity is of a "dark, dull hue" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 4): "everything was large, solid, brown" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 11). Lulworth Hall stands in stark comparison to the surrounding parish, which has "grays, browns, purples, glinting golds, and silvers" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 18). The very name establishes the estate's sleepiness, "lull" meaning "to delude into a sense of security" or "to induce to sleep" ("lull, v.1", *OED*) or "a stupefied condition," ("lull, n.1", *OED*). The estate "looked like a blot upon the bright and lovely landscape. The place from a distance, compared with the surrounding country, was a blur and a blemish as it were,—sad, silent, solitary" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 4). These colors and the visual juxtaposition designate Lulworth Hall as a place apart, where the advancements of Victorian society have failed to take hold because its inhabitants live in the past. Cecilia physically embodies this contrast between the ugly and the beautiful; her beauty is masked by a "sickly green dress" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 11), yet her "lovely, fresh face looked up in utter amazement out of the hideous disguise" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 21). The depiction of the heroine's complexion is a common acknowledgment of her femininity, youthfulness, and virginity. Furthermore, in the

Victorian era, a time in which the empire thrived, and the British populace was confronting new and different people around the world, the image of a white beauty resonates as a distinction from “non-European races” (Rowbotham 209). Perrault describes his sleeping beauty’s “rich complexion: her cheeks preserved their crimson color, and her lips were like coral” even while she slept (Zipes, *Great Fairy Tale Tradition* 690). Thus, when Cecilia sits, “peeling an orange and quite unmoved, and she slowly curled the rind of her orange in the air” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 14), she metaphorically peels away the years of her youth without care. Ritchie advocates for the awakening of the Victorian woman by describing the paradoxical unattractiveness of the “catatonic” sleeping beauty, to quote Maria Tatar (146). She overemphasizes the characteristics of the heroine—sleeping, passive, and in need of rescue—and thus parodies the tropes of the genre.

The other characters in the story contribute to this parody. The agents acting upon Cecilia are her fairy godmother and prince: her great-aunt and her cousin, Frank Lulworth. Both of these characters act clumsily within their roles. Mrs. Dormer—a name that itself comically reflects the slumber of the household, resembling the Spanish and French *dormir* or Italian *dormire*, which both mean “to sleep”—only realizes her duty when it is almost too late: “‘Five-and-twenty!’ said the old lady, quite crossly. ‘I had no idea time went so fast. She ought to have been married long ago; that is, if she means to marry at all’” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 14). Stuck in her own slumber, she has overlooked her duties and let Cecilia pass too much time under the spell. She laments this mistake when Cecilia finally meets her prince and reacts poorly: “‘The girl is a greater idiot than I took her for,’ cried the old lady, ‘She has been kept here locked up until she has not a single idea left in her silly noddle. No man of sense could endure her for five minutes’” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 23). This brutal assessment fails to acknowledge that Cecilia has

become this way in part due to neglect from her fairy godmother, who spends her time looking over “old journals and letters” from her youth (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 12). Mrs. Dormer is another sleeping beauty, dreaming of her younger days: “the last twenty years had been like a long sleep, with the dream of what happened when she was alive and in the world continually passing before her” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 12). When, finally, it comes time for her to enter her new role and pass on the title of sleeping beauty to the next generation, she falters. “The poor old fairy was all puzzled and bewildered: her arts were powerless in this emergency. The princess had awakened, but in tears. ... The prince still stood by, distressed and concerned, feeling horribly guilty, and yet scarcely able to help laughing” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 23-24). The awakening occurs—but disastrously. The moment is comically dramatic, as the prince’s reaction notes, and the narrator interjects with an ironic summation: “Here was a catastrophe!” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 23). Truly, the situation is far from catastrophic, but Cecilia’s overreaction coupled with her prince’s bewildered laughter creates an embarrassingly theatrical climax for the tale. Despite their failure to participate in their roles properly, Frank Lulworth and Mrs. Dormer retain the attributes of their fantastical counterparts. The prince, whose name explains his attitude towards it all as he is *frankly* bemused, “was a handsome young fellow, with a charming manner” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 20). Mrs. Dormer has “a real old spinning-wheel and distaff among other things, at which Cecilia, when she was a child, had pricked her fingers trying to make it whirr as her aunt did” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 8). The symbol of the spinning-wheel is immediately recognizable as a classic image of the *Sleeping Beauty* story; it features in both the Brothers Grimm and Perrault versions of the tale. Ritchie pays homage to the curse of the original stories by having her protagonist prick her finger on the spindle. The spinning-wheel evokes the “spinster,” an unmarried woman past a certain age, and thus this

“curse” could also be taken as a curse to singledom; it is only lifted once a man falls in love with the protagonist. The colloquial idea of the “spinster” originated as a gendered term only in the eighteenth century (Pollak 57). The spinning wheel also acts as a sign of femininity— “that notorious and suspect emblem of womanhood” (Warner, *From the Beast* 250)—and its “shape and role in women’s work gave rise to ripe innuendos” connecting it to a woman’s sexuality (Warner, *From the Beast* 137). Additionally, the spinning wheel evokes the evolving technologies of the industrial age, an era in which commercialized production of thread and yarn add a new connotation to the spinning image (Steinbach 91). In all, the comical mishaps of Cecilia’s awakening highlight the narrator’s ironic tone, encouraging a skeptical interpretation of the story rather than accepting the “happy ending” at face value.

Further complicating the romance plot, the prince of Ritchie’s “Sleeping Beauty” wields no sword but instead holds financial power over the princess, thus acting as an ambiguous hero whose position as the lover is marred by his future possession of the Lulworth family property. Frank Lulworth mirrors Perrault’s prince, who comes from a family that “had succeeded to the throne” during the princess’s sleep (Zipes, *Great Fairy Tale Tradition* 691). Mrs. Dormer introduces Frank as such: “This is Francis Lulworth, a very intelligent young man, who has got hold of your fortune and ruined all your chances, my dear” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 21). Thus, Frank acts as the chivalric knight in shining armor by offering financial protection to the young girl, yet ironically, he also is the figure who threatens to take her money away. The entailment of property to a male relative was only one of the many ways women were discriminated against financially in England before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. “When a woman married, everything she owned became her husband’s; anything she acquired once she was married belonged to him as well, even if he had deserted her” (Steinbech 169). Thus, the princess needs to marry Frank to

avoid being turned out of her own house once Mrs. Dormer dies—a grim situation that limits the heroine’s ability to decide if she even wants to marry this prince. The ambiguity of his character—both the villain and the hero—highlights the mediocrity of this prince and makes the reader question his admirability; like the other princes I examine in this thesis, Frank fails to measure up to the brave heroism or charming handsomeness one might expect from the hero of a fairy tale.

Ritchie resists sentimentalizing this tale by infusing it with humorous scenes that diverge from the plot of a romantic tale. Cecilia’s “imprisonment” in the dreary, gray manor symbolizes the dullness of the slumbering woman that accepts her place within society. Virginal flower images surround Cecilia, with her “blooming cheek” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 8) and “a fortunate stolidity and slowness of temperament [that] had saved her from being crushed and nipped in the bud” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 7-8). In a way, her dullness acts as protection; if she were aware of how miserably boring her life was, she would be unable to survive it. In Victorian society, “leisure was a sign of status” (Atlick 52), so Cecilia’s permanent state of repose also mirrors the desires of class. The idealized qualities of passiveness and domesticity are hyperbolized in Cecilia: she is so passive that she cares not about the entailment of her estate nor the passing of her youth; she is so domestic, she never leaves her home. Ritchie emphasizes the ridiculousness of these feminine expectations by hyperbolizing them. When she finally awakes, Cecilia “blushed for the first time, I believe, in the course of her whole existence” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 22) and then again is found “blushing and blinking more deeply” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 23) before finally crying. This dramatic awakening literally brings color to her previously colorless life, and she embodies the feminine youthfulness of a sleeping beauty. Additionally, her blushing symbolically begins her sexual awakening, implying that she

wakes from her asexual existence and becomes ready for marriage. However, her crying during this moment showcases her immaturity and inability to properly react in any situation; once again she is the bumbling princess overwhelmed by the responsibilities of her role. This situation highlights Ritchie's parody of the tale by critiquing the idealized sexual awakening of a female figure. Meanwhile, the reaction of Miss Bowley, who "suddenly fled with a scream" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 22) and the narrator's comment of "O horror!" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 22) portray this scene as a gothic horror drama, cueing to the reader that something in this fairy tale is not right. Cecilia's extreme naïveté, with her tears "like a child's" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 22) and her proclamations of "Oh, how silly I am!" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 23) establish how very juvenile she is. This contrasts with Bettelheim's notion of sleeping beauty's slumber as a time for maturation: "the harmonious meeting of prince and princess, their awakening to each other, is a symbol of what maturity implies: not just harmony within oneself, but also with each other" (Bettelheim 234). By creating this princess, Ritchie subverts the traditional fairy tale and problematizes the romance of Cecilia's fate.

Despite Ritchie's resistance to sentimentalism, she ends "Sleeping Beauty" with a wedding; however, the glimpse into Cecilia's future domestic life reveals that the "happy ending" may be undesirable. Cecilia and Frank marry, and even Mrs. Dormer leaves the house and begins to drive about "in a magnificent yellow chariot" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 26). Color has returned to Dorlicote Farm, and all are presumed to live "happily ever after." But what does this "happy ending" entail? For Cecilia—and the Victorian woman—marriage involves giving up one's property and, essentially, one's body. "Once they married, couples were expected to establish their own household. Contraception was not considered respectable and in any case was not reliable, so many working-class women spent the two decades or so after marriage pregnant,

breastfeeding, and/or caring for small children” (Steinbach 131). This “self-sacrifice” was considered “natural and inevitable” for women (Rowbotham 43) and was seen as their “destiny” (Steinbach 243). Considered the emotional sex, women were seen as requiring the dominant force of a husband to guide and protect them, like the rescuing prince of fairy tales. The ironically hyperbolized characters—the incapable fairy godmother, the awkward and dull princess, the money-chasing prince—illustrate the fallacy of the happy-ending trope. At the end of the tale, Cecilia remains confined by the domestic: “It is certainly like a fairy transformation to see Cecilia nowadays in her own home with her children and husband about her” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 25). Ritchie admits that this ending is inevitable: “Certainly the story would not be worth the telling if they had not been married soon after, and lived happily all the rest of their lives” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 25). Cecilia’s remark earlier in the tale hints at a darker reality: “I think people are very stupid to marry. Look at poor Jane Simmonds; her husband beats her” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 14). This small piece of dialogue brings us back into the historical setting of “Sleeping Beauty.” We may presume that Cecilia lives happily ever after as prescribed, but this story asks the reader to interrogate the society in which marriage is the only escape a woman can aspire to.

Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” parodies the fairy tale through comedic scenes and ambiguous characters, proposing an alternate moral to be taken out of the tale: that the “happy ending” of marriage might not be so appealing after all. Ritchie subverts the tropes of the *Sleeping Beauty* story to show the limitations of the life of the upper-class Victorian woman. The placement of this tale within a Victorian social sphere contrasts with the fantastic elements of the tale and encourages the reader to interrogate her own expectations for a fairy tale. Her rendition challenges the classic fairy-tale ending of marriage and domestic

bliss and conveys the immense boredom of the idle domestic lifestyle, portraying it as a form of slumber. The narrator's ironic and intimate tone communicates this idea to the reader, and her comedic and brutally honest treatment of the heroine, Cecilia, creates a princess whose faults confront the notion of the ideal Victorian woman, a submissive and inactive figure. Lacking emotion, desires, or any personal growth, Cecilia serves as a hyperbolized parody of the "submissive second sex," and she remains an uninspiring heroine even at the end of the tale when she marries but does not leave her family home, thus remaining trapped in the domestic sphere she grew up in. Ritchie criticizes the parents who raise their children to be like Cecilia—robots or dolls going through the motions of life rather than striving for independence or agency. Furthermore, the hero plays an ambiguous role, threatening to take away Cecilia's money but then saving her through marriage, only to imprison her once more within her castle. Cecilia's lack of agency in financial matters—she cannot inherit her family estate because of her gender—means that she must give her body to a man through matrimony to retain her property in any way. Cecilia seems to live happily ever after at the end of the story, but Ritchie encourages the reader to question the society in which marriage is often the only choice for a woman. The next two tales feature heroines who gain some agency in their lives compared to Cecilia. The positioning of "Sleeping Beauty" as the first story in *Five Old Friends* lays the groundwork for the interpretation of the subsequent tales as subversive.

## Chapter 2: *Beauty and the Beast*

The popular versions of *Beauty and the Beast* largely stem from stories by two female French authors: Madame de Villeneuve and Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont. Long and intricate, de Villeneuve's tale outlines the basic elements of the story. De Beaumont's shortens de Villeneuve's tale and has become the European baseline of *Beauty and the Beast* (Harries 87-89). Anne Thackeray Ritchie adapts the story for a Victorian public, converting the classic tale into a commentary on the faults of materialism and greed, the lack of financial agency for many upper-class Victorian women, and the unpleasant necessity of marriage to retain one's property before the reform of the latter part of the century. Her "Beauty and the Beast" centers on the Barly family, who face financial difficulties and must move from their mansion in town to a small country cottage. By speculating in the trading market and deceiving his friend, Mr. Barly loses money that belongs to his daughter and accrues a debt to Guy Griffiths. To pay off the debt, his youngest daughter, Belle, agrees to live at the Griffiths estate as a companion to Mrs. Griffiths. Guy and Belle form a friendship, but his persistent proposals of marriage irritate her. She briefly returns home to her family, but she is plagued by dreams of Guy lying dead in the garden from a broken heart, and her guilt and the persuasion of the narrator's friend, H., bring her back to Guy's manor. In a dramatic climax, Guy declares his love for Belle, and she, it appears, reciprocates it. This story's "happy ending" seems to lend itself to an interpretation of Ritchie's tale in which the heroine's passage from father to husband marks a natural and beautiful transition, demonstrating the ideal path of a Victorian woman into matrimony. However, if we deign to investigate this assumption a bit further, we are left with a perhaps more somber reflection: women have no existence outside of their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, and their inability to exercise agency in their own lives is a tragedy. One may fall in

love with her captor, but she is still captive; the fateful climax in which the beast appears dead is the catalyst to this realization.

Ritchie begins her “Beauty and the Beast” with a frame story in which the narrator conveys her belief in the potential for magic in the real world. “Fairy times, gifts, music, and dances are said to be over,” the narrator begins (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 79). However, she amends this statement by allowing the possibility that these pleasantries “come to us disguised and made familiar by habit [so] that they do not seem to us strange” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 79). Akin to the beginning of “Sleeping Beauty,” this hypothesis establishes the basis upon which her historically placed story fits into the fairy-tale genre. The frame story continues by listing a series of juxtapositions, chronicling the normal events of the evening spent by the hearth and then noting the absence of mythical creatures or fairy-tale events. Some of these descriptions emphasize the frightening aspects of fairy tales: “these long past winter evenings [we] could sit without fear of fiery dwarfs skipping out of the ashes, of black puddings coming down from the chimneys to molest us” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 79). She continues to describe various other fairy-tale situations that do not take place: the cat speaking “in human tones,” children becoming changelings, jewels falling out of open mouths, “scenes of horror and treachery” in the mirror (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 80). These disastrous and frightful elements of the fairy tale are perhaps what Ritchie assumes most Victorians wish to evade: the elements of tales in which vices like materialism—a possible result of the increased material culture and new technologies in Victorian England—result in extraordinary punishment. Technological developments in the Victorian era, in fact, have eliminated the necessity of many of the magical elements of fairy tales: “we have discovered that instead of rubbing lamps, or spreading magic tablecloths upon the floor, we have but to ring an invisible bell (which is even less trouble), and a smiling genius

in a white cap and apron brings in anything we have to fancy” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 80). The magic of new technology (the “invisible bell”) occurs here, rather than a fairy spell or enchantment. Indeed, the technological advances of the era likely appeared magical to many Victorians. Developments by the end of the century included steam power railways and iron ships, looms, printing presses, farmers’ combines, the telegraph, intercontinental cable, photography, anesthetics, and the initiation of universal compulsory education (Reidhead 979). These innovations paved the way for a new commodity culture in which consumerism reigned and the British benefited from “growing material prosperity, and a level of industrial production and foreign trade that set England far ahead of all other countries” (Thomson 100). However, the benefits of these developments remained largely limited to the middle and upper classes (Thomson 101), and Ritchie’s fairy tales remain within that realm of Victorian society. Despite the narrow slice of society portrayed, the story reminds the reader of the enchantments of scientific developments and the potential for whimsy in one’s life. Fantasy enters the narrator’s world when, “One night at twelve o’clock, just after she had left me, there was indeed a loud orthodox ring at the bell, which startled us both a little” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 80). Finally, the action begins after much suspense. The narrator describes how her house connects to that of Guy Griffiths by a door in the garden, “a postern-gate once upon a time” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 81). Here is the tell-tale introduction to the fairy tale: “once upon a time.” Through the intimate narrator’s commentary and observations, Ritchie emphasizes how one can find fantasy in the quotidian if one chooses to look.

Unlike in “Sleeping Beauty,” the narrator of “Beauty and the Beast” plays an active role in the plot of the tale by becoming a character in the story, and her agency in the tale further blurs the line between fairy tale and reality. The narrator acts both as storyteller and fairy

godmother, assisting the heroes and facilitating the plot. “‘You were right to come,’ said I. ‘They are excellent people. Guy is the kindest, best fellow in the whole world, and I have long heard of you, Miss Barly, and I’m sure such a good daughter as you have been will be rewarded some day’” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 126). The narrator opens the door for Belle to see Guy as a friend and, eventually, a husband. She acts as a confidant for Belle, a friend to Guy, and a sorceress working behind the scenes to bring the couple together. When Belle leaves, the narrator and H. convince her to return and re-enter the life of Guy. Without the narrator’s presence as a character, the story would not have its “happy ending.” The narrator notes, “old women are good for something after all, and can sometimes play a sentimental part in life as well as young ones” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 147). This reference to “old women” incorporates the long-standing tradition of their role in the telling and sharing of fairy tales: demonstrating “the importance of old women, nurses, grandmothers and the like for the passing on of such tales ... Storytellers may be referred to as Mother Goose or Mother Stork, a foolish old woman who tells ‘old wives’ tales,’ but such tellers may also be seen as wise women who instill moral precepts in the young” (Davidson 6). By combining the role of the narrator with that of the helper, Ritchie creates a female character with agency in the story and provides moral guidance to both the heroine and the reader.

The narrator peppers the story with small moral statements, which break from the plot for brief reprieves of general observations and reflections, categorizing the characters from the narrative within broader social ideas. For children, fairy-tale morals help them make sense of their own lives as they grow up, but for the adult, Victorian readers of Ritchie’s tales, they offer commentary on the social atmosphere of the era. Unlike Perrault and Grimm, her morals are not explicitly labeled and occur throughout the story rather than at the end. One moral the narrator

takes up is the criticism of the pursuit of wealth and materialism. To introduce the “fall” of the Barly family, the narrator describes how they “disappeared out of the prosperous, pompous, highly respectable circle in which they had gyrated, dragged about by two fat bay horses, in the greatest decorum and respectability” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 87). At first, this description appears appreciative of the delicacies of refined living, but upon further inspection, the diction conveys a sarcastic tone that ridicules the family’s material possessions: “pompous” implies moral insufficiency, and being “gyrated” and “dragged about” makes the family sound like powerless dogs being pulled along by a rope. In describing the social life of the Barlys, the narrator does not romanticize their activities. “Miss Barlys had left large cards with their names engraved upon them in return for other large cards upon which were inscribed equally respectable names, and the addresses of other equally commodious family mansions” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 88). This flippant inspection of the practice of card-leaving and visiting describes the activity with a detachment that, for modern readers, seems normal but to the Victorian would likely be read as dismissive and pejorative. The narrator further defines her position as separate from the life of the upper echelons by stating, “a mansion—*so the house-agents tell us*—is a house like another with the addition of a back staircase” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 88, emphasis mine). The narrator thus groups the reader with her outside of the social class of the Barlys—we are too poor and, thus, too morally superior to understand the language and architecture of the upper class. The mere “addition of a back staircase” further disrupts the significance of the term “mansion” by minimizing its value to a purely functional level, purposefully ignoring any higher connotations that the word conveys. Belle’s only comment on matters of wealth is: “I can’t bear talking about money” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 91). Belle is the admirable character in this tale; the heroine, she is the favorite daughter and admired by all

who see her. Her beauty and kindness establish her as a figure meant to be emulated, so this statement against discussing money acts as a condemnation of material wealth. Belle's financial naïveté contributes to her characterization as the ideal Victorian woman; uninterested in "masculine" affairs, she busies herself with the domestic situation of the family's new cottage and never attempts to leave her assigned sphere. "Upper- and middle-class women were sedulously set apart from the worlds of commerce and, generally, of intellect" (Atlick 50). Ultimately, Belle's distance from monetary issues and the condescending portrayal of the wealthy dissuades the reader from falling into the worship of material possessions.

Following the theme of condemnation of materialism, the central issue in the story arises from Mr. Barly's heedless endeavors to accumulate more wealth through speculative means and the treatment of Belle as currency. Mr. Barly's carelessness in trade leads him to betray Guy Griffiths by taking Belle's money, held in a trust by Guy until she comes of age. In his hasty attempt to regain his former status and wealth, Mr. Barly sacrifices Belle's financial stability, further demonstrating how middle- and upper-class Victorian women had no financial independence and relied entirely upon the men in their lives, for better or for worse. Despite the tale's portrayal as a love story, ultimately Guy purchases Belle from her father as a companion to his mother for twenty years "as if that was the most natural thing in the world" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 118). Insight into Mr. Barly's thoughts reveals his panicked worry when confronted by Guy: "he began to ask himself how could he face him? ... Should he confess? Oh, no—no, that would be the most terrible of all!" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 110-111). Given a chance for retribution, he shies away from it, deciding to obscure the truth further rather than face the consequences of his actions. Ultimately, it is Belle who must bear the weight of his betrayal. In other *Beauty and the Beast* tales, "the father figures invariably personify the sweet voice of

reason, wisdom, and prudence. Paternal authority is dressed in the most favorable possible colors” (Tatar 173). Mr. Barly subverts this trope, acting cowardly and greedy rather than “civilized” like the other fathers of this tale type (Tatar 173). Ritchie portrays the cruelty of the English class system through Mr. Barly’s deceit. In contrast, Guy remains starkly aware of his own material triumphs and the sheer luck that placed him in his situation. “What was it but a chance that he had been born what he was? And yet old Barly, in all his troubles, had a treasure in his possession for which Guy felt he would give all his good fortune and good repute, his roses—red, white, and golden—his best heart’s devotion, which he secretly felt to be worth all the rest” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 117-18). The description of Belle as a “treasure in his possession” quantifies her as a material thing, something to be bought, sold, or traded. Rather than existing as her own person, Belle depends on the decisions of the men around her.

Unlike Belle, the other Barly sisters have some control over their financial situations. They display misplaced cares in their desire for wealth and social status. Anna, described regally throughout the story, acts as “queen-regnant” in the Barly mansion at Capulet Square (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 89). “She had been in no hurry to leave the comfortable kingdom where she reigned in undisputed authority, ratifying the decisions of the ministry downstairs, appealed to by the butler, respectfully dreaded by both the housemaids” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 89). Born into wealth and status not unlike the royal family, Anna luxuriates in her queenly abode, but when her power is transferred to a less-seemly location, “Anna, who had been so admirable as a general, broke down under the fatigue of the actual labor in the trenches which belonged to their new life” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 98). The narrator chooses this moment to give a piece of moral commentary: “A great many people can order others about very brilliantly and satisfactorily, who fail when they have to do the work themselves” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends*

98). Ever the instructor, Ritchie condemns the hypocrisy of those who lead through demands and not examples. When Belle works to make the cottage more comfortable for her father, Anna berates her for “forgetting herself; bringing us down lower indeed than we are already sunk” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 101). Anna also condemns Belle’s lack of “ladylike propriety” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 143) and laments that “*her* sister ... was so oblivious of the laws of society, propriety, modesty” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 144). Considering the properties necessary to succeed in the marriage market, Anna’s commentary may be seen as beneficial to both sisters, since one’s behavior reflects upon the entire family. Anna also has a clear understanding of the family finances. In contrast, Anna is confident in her capability to understand commerce: “When Anna talked business, Mr. Barly used to be quite dazzled by her practical clear-headedness, her calm foresight and powers of rapid calculation” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 91). Despite Anna’s comprehension of financial matters, Belle remains the apple of her father’s eye. Belle’s other sister, Fanny, “was fond of fashion, flirting, and finery” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 90). When Mr. Barly departs to visit Mr. Griffiths, Fanny asks for a number of fashionable, expensive gifts to be brought back for her (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 107). Anna interrupts this catalogue and chides her sister for forgetting her place. Fanny is obviously the undesirable sister, self-obsessed and frivolous, but this episode with Anna hints that perhaps there is more value in a woman’s financial sufficiency. Anna challenges the stereotypes in which women are supposed to fit, while Belle falls gratefully into them. Who in the story are we meant to align with? Ultimately the narrator criticizes the other daughters, describing the actions of Fanny and Anna with melodrama, while depicting Belle as a kind-hearted girl who is misused by her situation. When Fanny seeks the friendship of the Ogdens after her departure from Capulet Square, their failure to visit leaves her “feeling as if it was through her poor little heart that she

was piercing and sticking” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 99). In the end all three sisters have the same fate: Anna, Fanny, and Belle marry well, thus regaining financial stability. Unlike her sisters, however, Belle sees beyond the allure of prosperity, and this is what establishes her as an admirable heroine. She “discovered that at eighteen, with good health and plenty to do, happiness is possible, even without a carriage” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 103). Belle thus lives thus beyond the confines of social class and finds her happiness in other places, yet ironically it is she who ends up marrying the rich Guy Griffiths and inheriting his immense estate; materialism prevails in the story after all.

Guy Griffiths is another morally ambiguous hero, characterized as a rough but loveable man, juxtaposing his masculine toughness with the sensitivity of his heart. The adjectives used to describe him convey his beastliness indirectly and psychologically, and his description portrays him as outside of the norms of Victorian male attractiveness. While the most admirable traits of the Victorian man were his independence and “gentlemanly politeness” (Steinbech 167), Guy depends upon Belle and repeatedly acts outside of the codes of character. Furthermore, nineteenth-century male heroes, in order to “form fitting mates for the heroines ... are courageous, physically prepossessing, if not absolutely handsome; high principled and noble-natured, good-mannered and family-minded” (Rowbotham 155). The narrator pronounces Guy “shaggy” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 82, 113, 118, 125), “dark and sulky” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 85), “hasty, clumsy” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 116), “with gleaming white teeth and black bristling hair” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 117). His rugged animal-qualities imply a dangerous sexuality, contrary to the prim virginity of the heroine, Belle. Furthermore, his very name shows his regularity and lack of special attributes; “Guy” is a generic name that acts almost as a placeholder, referencing what he is—a man—rather than his personality. Like Frank

Lulworth, Guy is another morally complicated hero, playing the part of the villain (Belle's captor) and the lover simultaneously. We view Guy through the lens of the narrator, Belle, and his own perspective, each with a differing view of him. The narrator sees him for his kind heart, qualifying negative impressions with positive afterthoughts. He is "a broad, thick-set, round-shouldered young man of forbidding aspect" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 113), but "a smile brightened up his grim face very pleasantly" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 85). She appreciates Guy's intentions and goodness, despite his clumsy inarticulateness and messy exterior. With alliteration that emphasizes his well-meaning gruffness, the narrator acknowledges him early in the story: "Guy's grunt of gratitude was more affecting to me than many a long string of words" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 86). Despite the narrator's kindly view of him, Guy looks upon himself with great disdain, both at his appearance and his actions: "he gave an uncouth sudden caper of rage and regret at his own appearance. 'To think that happiness and life itself and love eternal depend upon tailors and hair-oil'" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 125). This censure of the vanities of Victorian popular culture echoes the sentiment of anti-materialism Ritchie evokes throughout the tale. Furthermore, Guy regularly refers to himself as a "brute" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 84, 131, 140). His lack of propriety and social sensibility would offend Anna Barly immensely, we can imagine. It certainly acts as a barricade between him and Belle. "Poor fellow! he meant no harm and only intended this by way of conversation. Belle in her secret heart said to herself that he was a cruel brute; and poor Guy, having made this impression, broken a dozen wine-glasses, and gone through untold struggles of shyness, now wished them both good-night" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 124). The narrator here seems omniscient, observing her own idea about Guy—"Poor fellow!"—as well as Belle's reaction and Guy's "untold struggles of shyness." The narrator has a certain all-knowing power within the narrative, which is not unusual

for a fairy tale but becomes more interesting with the consideration of her place in the plot as a character. This dual role shows a potential separation between Miss Williamson as the narrator and Ritchie, with the former playing the role of a character in the tale and Ritchie acting as a meta-narrator by infusing irony and darkly sarcastic comedy into the story. For his part, Guy admits his misbehavior to Belle, condemning himself for it, yet Belle—ever a kind and forgiving woman—patiently dissuades his self-pity: Guy states, “I behaved like a brute to you and your father yesterday. I am not used to ladies’ society. I am stupid and shy and awkward” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 131). Sweet-tempered Belle replies: “If you were very stupid ... you would not have said that, Mr. Griffiths. Stupid people always think themselves charming” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 131). Beastliness manifests in this tale as a lack of gentility and an excess of vulgarness, and it is up to Belle to tame the wild Beast through marriage.

Belle Barly represents the ideal feminine Victorian personality in all but one regard—her hesitancy to marry. The name Belle, meaning “beauty” in French, conveys her physical appearance as is typical in *Beauty and the Beast* tales, but Ritchie manipulates the title slightly by lengthening it to Belinda: “rather a silly name, isn’t it?” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 85). By attributing a second quality to the name—silliness—Ritchie complicates the character and challenges the notion of a perfect heroine. “The name Belle or Beauty assumes meaning through the behavioral traits that the young woman displays as a good housekeeper and domesticated woman: industrious, diligent, loyal, submissive, gentle, self-sacrificial” (Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick* 140). Freshly out of school and uncaring of the “splendors and proprieties” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 88) that fascinate her sisters, the protagonist is defined by her “natural brightness of spirit” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 97) and physical beauty—two aspects that regard how she pleases others. Her temperament allows her to support her father with nary a tear, comfort Guy

although she doesn't love him, and bare the admonishments of her sister without anger or retribution. "But not even Belinda, with all her courage, could resist the decision of so much experience, or Anna's hints and innuendoes, or, more insurmountable than all the rest, a sudden shyness and consciousness which had come over the poor little maiden, who turned crimson with shame and annoyance" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 144-45). Once again, blushing represents a sexual awakening as the virginal princess confronts the possibility of matrimony and the physical intimacy that entails. Malleable and subordinate, the passive heroine follows where she is bidden, whether instructed by her father, her sister, Guy, or H. and the narrator. She is a skittish girl, afraid of the wardrobe in her room in the house at Capulet Square and of the ghostly shadows of the mansion (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 88-89). In the presence of Guy, she is "nervous" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 124) and "blushing" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 132). Belle sees herself as "foolish" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 148), and the narrator describes her as "poor Belle" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 133). These attributes follow the guidelines for the ideal Victorian woman: "there was the wider implication that woman was inferior to man in all the ways except the unique one that counted most (to man): her femininity" (Atlick 54). Belle's failure to follow the rules of propriety prescribed by her sister, Anna, however, conflicts with the most essential tenet of female morality in the Victorian era: "respectability" (Atlick 174). In other *Beauty and the Beast* tales, the moral is similar. In de Beaumont's version, the ideal "young bourgeois girl of the eighteenth century ... cares for her father and is prepared to sacrifice her own interests for his; she behaves generously to her sisters even when they are vile to her; she is sufficiently lacking in vanity to value true goodness over good looks" (Teverson 59-60). Like Cecilia, Belle is largely passive and follows the instructions of those around her; however, Belle surpasses Cecilia slightly by exerting some agency in her life when she rejects

multiple marriage proposals from Guy. In terms of her role as heroine, Belle's virtue is critical; "it is one of the roles of a virtuous woman to humanize and civilize bestial masculinity" (Teverson 60). But why should the woman "civilize" the man in this tale? The blandness of the prince and Belle's fervent denial of his proposals fight against this role of the woman. Guy sees the tenuousness of the situation, perhaps because he is sensible of his own faults. "One of his fancies about her was that Belinda was a bird who would fly away some day, and perch up in the branches of one of the great trees, far, far beyond his reach" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 138). This fear of losing her once he lets her out of her cage demonstrates how Belle has evolved from Cecilia's utter passiveness into a more complex character. Unlike Cecilia, who never sought any exit from her entrapment in the palace, Belle tries to leave Guy by returning home and resists his attempts to entrap her in a new cage: marriage. Ultimately, she chooses which household will entrap her: that of a husband or that of her father.

The parental figures in the tale each play interesting and oedipal roles. Mrs. Griffiths occupies the position of the neglectful mother, and the absence of her affection for Guy manifests itself in his desire for Belle's love. This oedipal allocation of emotion mirrors Belle's transition from her father's house to Guy's and the eventual transfer of her love. Guy's love of his mother may be viewed as the instigator of the entire plot; his story begins with his mother's illness and the narrator's visit to his estate. The narrator reveals that Guy's mother failed to impart true maternal love onto her youngest son but instead preferred her oldest son, Hugh, and her late husband: "She had been a real mother to Hugh, who was gone; to Guy, who was alive still and patiently waiting to do her bidding, she had shown herself only a step dame; and yet I am sure no life-devoted mother could have been more anxiously watched and tended by her son" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 83). The likening to a stepmother highlights the separation between

the two; without gaining any emotional satisfaction from his mother, Guy seeks that emotional support elsewhere—from Belle. The narrator uses the occasion of Mrs. Griffiths' illness to impart another moral upon the reader: "perhaps, —how shall I say what I mean? —if he had loved her more and been more entirely one with her now, his dismay would have been less, his power greater to bear her pain, to look on at her struggling agony of impotence. Even pain does not come between the love of people who really love" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 83). His expectation of receiving love in return is what limits his potential for satisfaction. Similarly, his desire for Belle's romantic love prevents him from receiving it; if he loved her with no expectation of love in return, he might receive that love over time, but his urgent questions of marriage perturb Belle and demonstrate how his love is selfish. His language in reference to his mother mirrors that which he uses towards Belle: about his mother, he says to the narrator, "selfish beast that I am! I upset her, poor soul! I behaved like a brute" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 84); to Belle, he says, "I behaved like a brute to you" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 131). This transfer of his guilt from his mother to his lover accompanies his expectations of love in return. Despite his mother's "quick sarcastic tongue and hard unmotherlike ways" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 82), he persists in hoping for her love, and despite Belle's repeated lack of desire to marry him, he continuously asks her. Consent, it would seem, is something malleable in the eyes of the Beast. The ambiguity of the prince as both captor and potential lover demonstrates Ritchie's subversion of the marriage plot; with so unimpressive a prince, what does Belle receive in exchange for her kindness? Her freedom is limited, and receiving Guy as a reward for her goodness seems almost like a punishment.

Belle's movement from the possession of her father to that of her lover represents the reality of a society in which women had extremely limited economic freedom or agency. The

oedipal nature of the father-daughter-lover relationship is also a common theme within *Beauty and the Beast* tales. “The essential characters are the protagonist and his or her projections on parent-figures” (Davidson 30). The attentive daughter, Belle harbors intense worries over her father and pays much attention to him. “By degrees it seemed to her, as she listened, that the cheerfulness seemed to be dying out of his voice, and only the quaver remained; but that may have been fancy, and because she had taken a childish dislike to the echoes of the house” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 90). Her father does not feel worthy of her attentions, much like Guy believes himself unlovable and ugly to her: “‘My child,’ he said, ‘why do you trouble yourself so much for me? Your sister has told me all. I don’t deserve it. I cannot bear that you should be brought to this. My Belle working and slaving with your own hands through my fault—through my fault’” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 102). The oedipal connection becomes clearer from Mr. Barly’s perspective, as he compares his daughter to his dead wife. “He seemed to see his wife standing in the garden, holding the roses up over her head, looking like Belle; like, yet unlike. Why it should have been so, at the thought of his wife among the flowers, I cannot tell” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 110). The narrator’s lack of awareness is interesting; up to this point, she has been largely all-knowing, so her inability to explicate Mr. Barly’s mental processes highlights the murkiness of the boundary between romantic and familial love. The trio form a triangulation of desire: a competition for dominance between two men with a woman as median, with the woman viewed as “property” (Sedgwick 26). The incestual elements of the romance further avoid sentimentalizing the situation. “‘Love! That is not for me; but I wish I had a slave,’ thought poor Belle, hanging her head over the book as it lay open in her lap, ‘and that he was clever enough to tell me what my father is doing at this minute’” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 128-29). Belle’s lack of interest in romantic love but desire to see her father represents her reluctance

to lose her innocence and make the transfer to her husband's home. Barely a woman, she clings to the familiar comfort of her father. Bettelheim argues that "separation anxiety ... occur[s] at all ages in the unconscious" (15) and "being pushed out of the home stands for having to become oneself" (79). Thus, this transition to a place of relative agency frightens Belle, and she desires nothing but to return to the command of her loving father. Belle is her father's favorite among all his daughters, so the parting is even more difficult for them both, but, according to Bettelheim's theory, their separation is necessary for her to mature and find a happy ending. However, in Ritchie's tale, Belle's lack of agency as she transfers from the possession of one man to another is unpleasant and alarming. This tale critiques the patriarchy by portraying both Mr. Barly and Guy as inadequate and selfish. Belle's desire to remain at home with her father—in the cottage in which she has finally found her place—demonstrates how her romance with Guy is an exchange in which her feelings and opinions do not matter.

The central imagery of Ritchie's "Beauty and the Beast" lies in the garden and the rose; in this story, Belle is the rose being passed from one man to another, plucked from her home and transplanted into foreign places where she cannot thrive. Roses are fragile and delicate, mirroring the ideal Victorian woman who "was to cultivate fragility, leaning always on the arm of the gentleman who walked with her in a country lane or escorted her in to dinner" (Atlick 53). Thus, Belle's attachment to the rose is not surprising. Like the needle that pricks Belle's finger, a thorn pricks her father's and initiates the pattern of events that leads to her marrying Guy. Mr. Barly

began to think again—no wonder—of Belle and her fancy for roses, and mechanically, without much reflecting upon what he was about, he stopped and inhaled the ravishing sweet smell of the great dewy flowers, and then put out his hand and gathered a spray

from which three roses were hanging; . . . as he gathered it, a sharp thorn ran into his finger, and a heavy grasp was laid upon his arm. (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 113)

This “mechanical” action fits the characterization of Mr. Barly—a thoughtless, reckless man who, despite his good intentions, clashes with the world around him. The industrial cannot harmonize with the natural. Like how England’s fast-growing industrial economy took advantage of female workers (Steinbech 173-74), Mr. Barly’s rushed actions lead to misuse of his daughter. When Guy confronts Mr. Barly, the rose he held “had fallen to the ground” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 115), symbolizing the fall of Belle from his control. In that moment, she transfers from being the property of her father to that of her employer and future husband. The rose “was lying broken and shining upon the gravel” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 117). Like the rose, Belle cannot thrive after being plucked. In Guy’s house, she is unhappy and misses her father, and in her own home she is plagued with guilt and dreams of causing Guy’s death by staying away. No longer can she be the innocent youth who takes care of the cottage and finds happiness in simple things. Mr. Barly laments that he has “paid for them [the roses] dearly enough” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 119), viewing the transaction morosely and yet considering the separation from his daughter a loss of his own rather than her misfortune to bear. Like Belle, the roses are seen as an object whose possessor should be envied; “As the cab drove along, people passing by looked up and envied the man who was carrying such loveliness through the black and dreary London streets. Could they have seen the face looking out behind the roses they might have ceased to envy” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 119). Furthermore, the rose comes to represent Guy’s love for Belle. In her room there waits for her “a glass cup of cut roses” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 128) and a bookmarked poem: “‘O, my love’s like a red, red rose / That’s newly sprung in June! / O, my love’s like the melody / That’s sweetly played in tune!’ and that was signed with a G”

(Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 128). Fittingly, Guy's rose garden becomes the one place in his estate where Belle can flourish, but it is also the sight of his near-death: the event which ties her down to him forever, when "it was all twilight by this time among the roses" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 149). The garden becomes the place that entraps Belle, masquerading as a location of love.

The romance of "Beauty and the Beast" is ultimately one that Belle neither asks for nor desires, but she has no choice but to accept her beastly captor eventually because, as a woman traded for her father's debt, she lacks financial or personal freedom. Like the Victorian woman stuck in the domestic realm without property rights, availability of divorce, or suffrage (Steinbech 169-170), Belle relies upon the men in her life to survive. Belle resembles Cecilia in this manner; both women express their intent *not* to marry during their stories, but both rely upon marriage to retain financial stability and succumb to it in the end. Does Belle truly wish to marry Guy? We do not know if they do, in fact, ever marry; the story cuts off before that conclusion is reached. We can assume from Belle's passionate dialogue—however brief—that their marriage is inevitable and the "happy ending" thus proceeds. Earlier in the tale, while discussing the new curtains she has made for her father's room in the cottage, Belle says to her sister, "don't you remember my old white dress that you never liked, Anna? Look how I have pricked my finger" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 99). The white dress evokes images of weddings and symbolic virginity—virginity which is broken by the flowering red rose, nonetheless—and the prick of a needle acts like a curse to marry and lose her virginal innocence. From Guy's first declaration of love, she adamantly refuses him. "He looked very pale, and said suddenly, in a quick, husky voice, 'Belle, will you marry me?' Poor Belinda opened her grey eyes full in his face. She could hardly believe she had heard aright. She was startled, taken aback, but she followed her impulse

of the moment, and answered gravely, ‘No, Guy’” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 133). Her unequivocal decline of his proposal might end the matter, but he manipulates her by his frequent sighs, repeated proposals, and frequent professions of his love. She was:

disquieted and unhappy. She felt that it was a false and awkward position. She could not bear to see him looking ill and sad, as he did at times, with great black rings under his dark eyes. It was worse still when she saw him brighten up with happiness at some chance word she let fall now and then—speaking inadvertently of his house as ‘home,’ or of the roses next year. He must not mistake her. She could not bear to pain him by hard words, and yet sometimes she felt it was her duty to speak them. (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 134-35)

This situation fails to evoke the emotional twinge of true romance but instead reads like an uncomfortable “nice guy” syndrome: where the man cannot fathom that a woman might reject him and, thus, makes her uncomfortable by repeatedly misconstruing her polite friendship as an indication of romantic or sexual attachment.

Due to her financial obligations, Belle cannot leave Guy’s house, and her kind demeanor prevents her from treating him with rudeness or anger regardless of how much he may deserve it. One day when he makes his regular statement of his desire to marry her, she interrupts him: “Don’t speak like this ever again, or I shall have to go away ... I wish I could like you enough to marry you. I shall always love you enough to be your friend; please don’t talk of anything else” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 135). It is undeniably evident that she views Guy as no more than a friend and has no desire to marry him. When, finally, Guy allows Belle to leave, he injects his seemingly kind statement with a clouded threat: “I don’t want to marry you against your will, or keep you here. Yes, you shall go home, and I will stop here alone, and cut my throat if I find I

cannot bear the place without you. I am only joking. I daresay I shall do very well” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 140). In the modern-day, this psychological manipulation would be classified as emotional abuse. Is this the hero Ritchie wishes us to admire? Or are we supposed to despise his selfish claims of affection for the girl he knows so little about, except that she is beautiful? Belle’s inclination to return appears to be due to the guilt she carries and the enjoyment she had of his friendship—not of any romantic attachment. “Poor Guy’s sad face haunted her” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 136). Her ill health while away—a certain sign of romantic attachment, one might argue—also ties itself to this guilt: “Belinda said she had not been well. She could not sleep, she said. She had had bad dreams. She blushed, and confessed that she had dreamt of Guy lying dead in the kitchen-garden” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 148). Naturally, Belle feels kindly towards her friend. “All this time she never thought of Guy except as a curious sort of companion; any thought of sentiment had never once occurred to her” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 132). He depends upon her conscience to bring her back to him, not her attachment or desires: “If you knew—if you had the smallest conception what your presence is to me, you would come back. I think you would” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 138-39). In the book left for Belle in her room, “some one had scored the sonnet there. ... ‘Being your slave, what should I do but tend / Upon the hours and times of your desire?’ it began” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 128). Despite this apparent literary proclamation, Guy fails to do anything for Belle besides tearing her from her family and giving her two little books and a vase of roses—both gifts with the ulterior motive of gaining her affection. Am I being too harsh upon our poor love-struck prince? Perhaps the narrator is being too forgiving.

Prior to the last page of the tale, the only indication that Belle may view Guy in a romantic light is the postscript of her letter to the narrator, in which she asks, “for that little green

volume of the *Golden Treasury* which is up in the tower room?” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 147). This book of poetry contains that very love poem left by Guy for her, and her letter thus seems to imply her attachment, but perhaps Belle, as young and clueless as she is, fails to recognize the importance of the request and simply enjoys poetry. When we reach the climax of the narrative, Belle enters the garden searching “timidly” for Guy (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 149), calling him by his proper name, Mr. Griffiths. “Then she remembered her dream in sudden terror, and hurried into the kitchen-garden to the fountain where they had parted” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 149). The series of comments that follow appear to belong to Belle’s inner dialogue: “What had happened? Some one was lying on the grass. Was this her dream? was it Guy? was he dead? had she killed him?” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 149). Fortunately, he is not dead but has merely “fallen asleep from very weariness and sadness of heart” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 150). Belle addresses him informally as “Guy—dear Guy” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 150), which awakens him. This comic ending swaps the gender dynamic of earlier tales: “He has merely fallen asleep, and in a reversal of ‘Sleeping Beauty,’ this ugly male can now be awakened by a female kiss” (Auerbach 17). The perspective appears to shift to that of the narrator: “the sweetest eyes, full of tender tears, were gazing anxiously into his ugly face. Ugly? Fairy tales have told us this at least, that ugliness and dullness do not exist for those who truly love. Had she ever thought him rough, uncouth, unlovable? Ah! she had been blind in those days; she knew better now” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 150). This passage appears to establish Belle’s changed mindset: her awakened fondness for the unattractive man who has been pursuing her so adamantly. Finally, the dialogue that seals her fate ends the story in the very garden where her father stole a rose. Like the roses, Belle is planted there to remain. Guy’s false death manipulates Belle—she *must* marry him—and the seemingly romantic dialogue that ends the story may be interpreted as doubly significant:

“As they walked back through the twilight garden that night, Guy said, humbly, —‘I shan’t do you any credit, Belinda; I can only love you.’ ‘*Only!*’ said Belinda. She didn’t finish her sentence; but he understood very well what she meant” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 150). Does he understand her? The italics imply deeper meaning to her simple response— “*Only?*” Yes, that is the *only* thing Belle may receive from matrimony. No property, wealth, public role, freedom, or any of the other privileges that men enjoy may be bestowed upon the reluctant bride. Before the Married Women’s Property Act of 1882, “a newly-wed husband legally acquired all his wife’s real and personal property, and he could dispose of it exactly as he thought fit” (Hart 103). Ritchie’s tale falls before this reform and reflects the difficulties facing women of the era. Belle *only* can hope to be loved, and women who long for something more are left with the lack that that word conveys. Belle exists *only* in relation to men: the pretty flower to decorate their gardens and sitting rooms.

Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s “Beauty and the Beast” demonstrates how women were held captive by the financial laws of Victorian England that limited their ability to hold property and placed their lives in the control of men. Belle represents one version of the ideal Victorian woman—beautiful, selfless, and kind—and she ultimately gives up her freedom twice: once to save her father and once to save Guy. The story also condemns materialism and social climbing through the characters of the Barly family. Ritchie challenges the concept of “civilized” English society by portraying the cruelty of the upper class. The narrator’s active presence in the tale conveys these messages by blurring the line between fairy tale and reality. Furthermore, the prince of “Beauty and the Beast,” Guy Griffiths, is another unattractive hero, imprisoning and emotionally manipulating Belle and then expecting her love at the end. Belle actively dislikes the romance of the story and tries to evade the proposals of marriage from Guy, but since her

existence depends upon the men around her, she has little agency in her own life and no real other option. This tale proposes not to accept the fairy tale at face value but, rather, to acknowledge the unpleasant and complicated status of women in the Victorian era, framed within the familiar structure of the fairy tale.

### Chapter 3: *Cinderella*

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Cinderella—or so the story goes. *Cinderella* is perhaps the most well-known fairy tale of them all and, according to Bruno Bettelheim, “the best-liked” (236). Its origins lie in China, where the tale had a place in cultural consciousness long before it was first written down in the ninth century C.E. (Bettelheim 236). The English literary sphere of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was inundated with Cinderellas, from Frances Burney’s *Evelina* to Jane Austen’s *Fanny Price* (Huang ix). Ritchie creates a sympathetic Cinderella in the form of Ella Ashford, a nice girl who enjoys dancing and helping out her father until he remarries and inherits two stepdaughters. The news Mrs. Ashford quickly takes over Ella’s role in the household and subjects her to various acts of unkindness, including excluding her from social outings and refusing her entry into society. Lady Jane, their kindly friend, takes pity on the girl and helps her attend the grand opening of the Crystal Palace. There, Ella meets and falls in love with the unattractive but wealthy Mr. Richardson, and their story proceeds without any mishaps or lost shoes because the prince has the sensible notion of acquiring Ella’s name and address from Lady Jane before they part. As in the previous tales, the narrator provides insightful commentary that elucidates the comically extreme elements of each character’s personality, from Mr. Richardson’s ugliness to Ella’s humility and Mrs. Ashford’s vanity. Mrs. Ashford and her daughters represent the shallow materialism discouraged in “Beauty and the Beast,” and the setting of the Crystal Palace also ties the romance plot to the spoils of empire and draws a complicated connection between female advancement and imperial gains. Ella is the most emancipated of the three princesses examined in this thesis, expressing and acting on her desire to go to the Crystal Palace and the ball and eventually marrying Mr. Richardson purely because she wants to. Furthermore, the agents of this plot are all women.

Lady Jane holds societal power due to her status and exercises this over Mrs. Ashford and others. Mrs. Ashford and Ella both control Mr. Ashford and Mr. Richardson, competing over them both and leaving little agency in the men's lives. Thus, this story transcends the patriarchal dominance of "Sleeping Beauty" and "Beauty and the Beast," problematizes the patriarchy, materialism, and upper-class societal competition.

As in the other tales I have examined, "Cinderella" begins with a frame story, establishing the narrator as an intimate acquaintance of both the reader and, we soon learn, one character of the fairy tale. The narrator's perception of the tale's events gives new insight into two protagonists of an earlier story. The frame story for "Cinderella" begins with a visit of the narrator and H. to the estate of "young Lulworth and his wife" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 31). These characters, of course, are none other than the lovely sleeping beauty, Cecilia, and her husband, Frank, of the first chapter of this thesis. The couple takes the narrator and H. to Cliffe Court, the residence of Sir Charles Richardson, whom Frank describes as "the handsomest man in the county" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 31). Later in the tale, we realize that Mr. Richardson is, in fact, a very ugly man, so Frank's comment must be understood in retrospect to be sardonic; Mr. Richardson is the prince of this tale, but he is unimpressive, and people only admire him because he is handsomely *rich*. The narrator notes how Cecilia "blushed in her odd way" and "still stared sometimes when she was shy, as she used to do before she was married" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 31). The pleasing alliteration of the latter passage suggests the retained beauty of the awoken princess, despite the couple's marriage occurring "a little more than two years" ago (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 32). The narrator describes other habits which Cecilia has retained after her awakening, including the extreme punctuality that previously exemplified her dull, brainless activity but now manifests as a characteristic of a habitual, accomplished wife.

The meta-narrative of these characters within another story further shows the irony Ritchie employs. By returning to her previous heroine and stripping her of her princess status, Ritchie breaks the magic of the fairy tale and replaces it with markedly ordinary occasions. The last sentence of the frame story states: “I wish I could perform some incantation like those of my friends the fairies, and conjure up the old farm bodily with a magic wave of my pen, or by drawing a triangle with a circle through it upon the paper—as the enchanters do” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 32). In the 1868 copy, such a very mark follows and separates the outer frame story, in which the narrator moralizes over the nature of fairy tales, from the internal *Cinderella* tale, in which the narrator physically plays the role of a character in the history of Mrs. Ashford—a clever addition that demonstrates Ritchie’s playful attitude towards the fairy tale (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 32).



Ella Ashford’s childish, fairy-like whimsy is stolen from her by an evil stepmother, and the only way she can regain her joy is through her freedom. Ella first appears in the tale during the frame story, as the narrator, H., Cecilia, and Frank Lulworth meander around the countryside and spy her on the road: “we passed a long pale melancholy-looking man riding a big horse, with a little sweet-faced creature about sixteen who was cantering beside him” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 34). The man here is Ella’s father, Mr. Ashford, and the bright daughter juxtaposed against his glum face is, of course, the heroine of the story. The narrator describes her as “a little green plant springing up through the mild spring rains and the summer sunshine, taller and prettier and sadder every year” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 46). Ella represents natural beauty,

and the narrator likens her attributes to those of animals, plants, and fairies: “She could sing charmingly, with a clear, true, piping voice, like a bird’s, and she used to dance to her own singing in the prettiest way imaginable” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 41). The narrator uses this opportunity to reflect upon dancing in general and to comment on the inequalities of occupation for girls and boys:

Some girls have a passion for dancing—boys have a hundred other ways and means of giving vent to their activity and exercising their youthful limbs, and putting out their eager young strength; but girls have no such chances; they are condemned to walk through life for the most part quietly, soberly, putting a curb on the life and vitality which is in them. They long to throw it out, they would like to have wings to fly like a bird, and so they dance sometimes with all their hearts, and might, and energy. (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 41-42)

The description of dancing as a method of releasing pent-up feminine energy creates a metaphor for female empowerment. Through connecting to their body and nature, Ella and other girls may express themselves in ways usually limited by social norms. Notably, dancing also plays a role within society through social dances and balls, events that, as Ella discovers, can bring opportunities for meeting potential spouses. The bird analogy also appears in “Beauty and the Beast,” when Guy thinks of Belle as a bird who might at any moment fly away; she did not fly away, however, and was effectively encaged by marriage. Although Ella also pursues romance in this tale, her prince admires her birdlike qualities rather than fearing them, and she breaks out of her cage by the end of the story. Her cage is in her father’s household, ruled by her stepmother, and she must escape in order to regain her independence. “Ella gave up her dancing after the new wife came to Ash place” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 43). As her life begins to improve with the

help of Lady Jane, she slowly regains the whimsical excitement of her childhood before her father remarried. When dressed by Lady Jane to go to the Crystal Palace, “her little feet flew as they used to do formerly” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 55); the slightest bit of happiness brings the childish, fairy-like excitement back into her body. Later, when Lady Jane announces that she is going to the ball, “the child opened her violet eyes, gasped, screamed, and began dancing about the room like a mad thing, jumping, bounding, clapping her hands, all so softly and gaily, and yet so lightly, in such an ecstasy of delight” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 68). Even the violet of her eyes signals her otherworldliness. Unlike her stepfamily, whose happiness depends upon material considerations, Ella finds joy in the natural world and gains a bit of freedom through matrimony.

The narrator characterizes Ella as a good-natured girl and praises her youthfulness, beauty, and housekeeping abilities. She is “a cheery, happy little creature, looking at everything from the sunny side, adoring her father, running wild out of doors, but with an odd turn for house-keeping, and order and method at home. Indeed, for the last two years, ever since she was twelve years old, she had kept her father’s house” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 40). Ella encompasses both the domestic and the wild, retaining a sense of childish fancy while maintaining her father’s affairs as the woman of the house. The idea of a girl so young taking on domestic responsibilities and even managing her father’s political career—“I think it was Ella who sent him into Parliament” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 40)—would suggest a loss of childish innocence and wonder, but Ella’s ability to retain her youthful wistfulness and the narrator’s positive tone when discussing it hints at the importance of remembering life outside of society and material possessions. Interestingly, Ella’s stepmother suggests she may be growing up too fast by taking on these responsibilities (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 45), yet Mrs. Ashford’s motive

lies in jealousy and a desire for control rather than a genuine interest in the wellbeing of her stepdaughter. This contrast between the good girl and the evil woman is a prevalent one in *Cinderella* stories, and it creates a tension in which Ella's goodness appears all-encompassing and, therefore, makes her a rather flat character. Despite this flatness, Ella still seems to be a more sympathetic heroine than Cecilia, whom the narrator brutally describes as lacking character, interests, or emotion. Unlike Cecilia and Belle, Ella has passions, emotions, and ideas—she *acts* to secure the future she desires.

Ella's goodness manifests in her humble, trusting character and, of course, in her beauty, but what makes her a more interesting heroine than the previous two princesses is that she wishes for something of her own. This desire cannot be interpreted as selfish because Ella is an impossible character to hate; even when she feels sad and all alone, she forbids herself from basking in self-pity: "Poor child, she sometimes used to think she had not a single friend in the world, but she would chide herself for such fancies: it must be fancy" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 47). She believes her stepmother when she is accused of being bad-tempered, and despite her despair at not being allowed to join her stepsisters in society, she masks her feelings and internalizes the accusations of Mrs. Ashford: "her father came into the room, and she smiled through her tears, and thought to herself that since her temper was so bad, she had better begin to rule it that very instant" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 49). Ella acts and speaks "timidly" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 49), and she demonstrates a reverential attitude in the presence of her elders, fulfilling the expectations of a good daughter: "A good girl's behavior was always modest, indicative of unselfish submission to those in due authority over her, such as her parents" (Rowbotham 23). When happiness finally does come her way, she can hardly believe it to be true. "Alas! would it ever come? The day's delight had given her a longing for more; and now

she felt the beautiful glittering vision was only a vision, and over already: the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palace; and the charming prince himself—was he a vision too? Ah! it was too sad to think of” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 64). This fairy-tale imagery—the “towers,” “palace,” and “prince”—conveys Ella’s dazzling sense of disbelief. She does not believe she deserves happiness more than anyone else, despite the hardships she has endured. “Poor dear! she was so little used to being happy, her happiness almost overpowered her” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 61). The narrator opines that Ella’s good character stems from her misfortunes: “And yet perhaps it was as well after all that early in life she had to learn to be content with a very little share of its bounties; she might have been spoilt and over-indulged if things had gone on as they began, if nothing had ever thwarted her, and if all her life she had had her own way” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 46). As in “Sleeping Beauty,” the narrator delivers a moral to parents reading this story: do not spoil your children, or they may end up rotten. Despite her humility and deference, Ella longs to go to the ball and see her prince. “The Cinderella plot ... is essentially a narrative about female desire and ambition” (Huang 67). Ever caring and thoughtful, Ella pines in silence and solitude for the things she craves, unwilling to demonstrate her pain to others for fear of hurting them: “she was aching and sickening for more, and longing with a passion of longing which is only known to very young people—she looked quite worn and pale, though she was struggling with her tears” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 66). The physical language of her longing reads like sexual desire, internalized and uncontrollable, yet the chaste and modest princess refrains from letting those wishes overtake her and compromise her virginal goodness. The very fact that Ella desires anything separates her from the preceding heroines, whose interests were either nonexistent (Cecilia) or only involved fulfilling the wants of others (Belle).

Each heroine of this thesis has been slightly more admirable than the last—she has a bit more autonomy, a larger sense of self, and the narrator speaks more highly (or, at least, less derogatively) of her. Cecilia thinks and feels nothing at all, like a “wax-doll” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 22); Belle only acts to please her father and Guy, but at least for most of the story, she remains steadfast in her decision not to marry; Ella overcomes her stepmother’s restrictions and finds a more enlightened ending. It is interesting, therefore, that the first heroine, Cecilia, exists within the story of Ella and even comments on the latter princess. The narrator treats Cecilia’s remarks, which parrot the lies Ella’s evil stepmother has spouted, with rude condescension: “‘She has a difficult temper,’ said Cecilia—who, once she got an idea into her soft, silly head, did not easily get rid of it again. ‘She is a great anxiety to poor Mrs. Ashford. She is very different, she tells me, to Julia and Lisette Garnier, her own daughters’” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 35). This language mirrors that of Mrs. Ashford, who tells Ella she may go out into society “when you are fit to be trusted in the world, and have cured your unruly temper” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 49). In fact, the Garnier sisters are rather unlikable. Julia is “fond of dress” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 48), and Lisette “was very vain, and thought herself irresistible” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 48-49). Cecilia’s inability to think for herself, even after her awakening and marriage to Frank, critiques the fairy-tale narrative of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale and aligns with my argument that Cecilia and her fate are not, in fact, meant to be aspirational. If Cecilia’s “soft, silly head” isn’t enough to prove her not an idealized fairy-tale princess, her association with the villain of this tale forces the reader to accept that something is not quite right. The narrator’s tone in describing Cecilia and her remarks indicates that we are not supposed to agree with the post-ever-after princess, so the reader enters the story of “Cinderella” with a curious comparison between the two heroines.

Like the other two princesses, Ella faces an unpleasant home situation that she must escape. Ella Ashford is a name that cleverly plays upon the Cinderella epithet by turning it around: “Cinder” becomes “Ash” and Ella drops its prefix. Her physical appearance, made dusty from sorting books, shows how her stepmother has denigrated her by reducing her status to that of a housemaid. She asks to attend the Crystal Palace with her family, full of trusting belief that they never intend to exclude her, “looking up with a smudgy face, for the books were all dirty and covered with dust” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 50). Mrs. Ashford condemns this appearance and uses it as an excuse to further distance Ella from the rest of the family. Before leaving for the Crystal Palace, she says to Ella, “by the way, if you find any visitors coming, go away, for I cannot allow you to be seen in this dirty state” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 50-51). Mrs. Ashford acts ashamed of Ella for her lowly actions, despite being the agent that causes Ella to do them. Yet even her dirtiness cannot obscure Ella’s beauty. “Young Mr. Richardson ... passed a pretty maid-servant, carrying a great pile of folios, upon the stairs. She looked so little fitted for the task that he involuntarily stopped and said, ‘Can I assist you?’ The little maid smiled and shook her head, without speaking. ‘What a charming little creature!’ thought Mr. Richardson” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 51). Unlike the Perrault version, in which the princess becomes dirtied from ash from the fire (Perrault 182), Ella is dusty from moving books, an action that is less degrading because it involves admirable materials and does not require the heroine to perform intense labor on the ground. “Long before Perrault gave ‘Cinderella’ the form in which it is now widely known, ‘having to live among the ashes’ was a symbol of being debased in comparison to one’s siblings, irrespective of sex” (Bettelheim 236). Mr. Richardson’s immediate enchantment demonstrates that Ella’s beauty transcends her status, and thus she is not actually “debased” compared to her stepsisters. Perhaps Mrs. Ashford knows that Ella radiates loveliness even when

dirty, so her motives for hiding Ella away are more rooted in fear of her daughters losing marriage opportunities rather than merely being ashamed of Ella's appearance. To her credit, we know that Mrs. Ashford's fears were correct—Ella steals away the potential suitor of Lisette. Regarding Mr. Richardson, Lisette says, "I don't know whether I shall have him. I'm always afraid of being thrown away" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 65). Lisette's lack of interest in Mr. Richardson subverts the plot by comically dissolving the tension; Lisette doesn't really care if Ella marries Mr. Richardson, so the ending to the tale lacks a dramatic conclusion for the stepsisters and instead treats competition for suitors as a normal part of life.

Like Frank Lulworth and Guy Griffiths, Mr. Richardson is a hero of questionable admirability, inferior to Ella in looks and temperament. Mr. Richardson first spies Ella when they are both children and she has lost none of her happy, youthful energy.

One day a naughty boy ... happened to see Ella alone in a field. She was looking up at the sky and down at the pretty scarlet and white pimpernels, and listening to the birds; suddenly she felt so strong and so light, and as if she *must* jump about a little, she was so happy; and so she did, shaking her pretty golden mane, waving her poppies high over head, and singing higher and higher, like one of the larks that were floating in mid air. The naughty boy was much frightened, and firmly believed that he had seen a fairy.

(Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 42)

Here Ella becomes birdlike again, and her impulsive, playful movements are guided only by her whims and fancies rather than any attention to societal codes or material concerns. Ella's depictions are rooted in unhuman, mythical, or natural depictions, signaling her separation from the material world of her stepfamily. The description of Mr. Richardson as "naughty" in contrast to Ella, who is "so strong and so light," establishes Ella's superiority in the match. He is aware of

this contrast, too; he tells her, “your dancing puts me in mind of a fairy I once saw in a field at Cliffe long ago. Nobody would ever believe me, but I did see one” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 70). Ella is beautiful, kind, and humble, and her prince is surprisingly unattractive and bland. His personality appears no better than his looks. “As for Richardson himself, it was a case of love at first sight. He had seen *many thousand young ladies* in the last few years, but not one of them to compare with this sweet-faced, ingenuous, tender, bright little creature” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 59, emphasis mine). This seemingly romantic sentence quietly reveals the rakishness of the young man. Furthermore, it is established early in the tale that Lisette expects a marriage proposal from Mr. Richardson. Therefore, it can be inferred that they have already established a strong mutual acquaintance and a tacit understanding that marriage is to follow. Immediately after meeting Ella, he casts Lisette aside like an undesirable acquaintance. “And if you see the Ashfords get out of the way. I should have to walk with those girls, and my heart is here transfixed for ever” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 59). Even if his romantic intentions with Ella are pure, how can he so easily betray the trust of another lady? Has he done this before—did he ever intend to propose to Lisette? Either scenario places the young hero in a bad light, and the appellation of “naughty” seems fitting. By creating a third mediocre prince, Ritchie shows once again that the perfection of the fairy-tale romance is diluted in the real world.

Ella’s attraction to Mr. Richardson despite his outward appearance demonstrates her goodness while also subverting the expectations of the genre. “Charles Richardson was a short ugly little man, very gentlemanlike, and well-dressed. He was the next heir to a baronetcy; he had a pale face and a snub nose, and such a fine estate in prospect—Cliffe Court its name was—that I do not wonder at Miss Lisette’s admiration for him” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 58). His wealth is his only attraction. The narrator later references his “kind little pale plain face”

(Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 68) and his “dear little ugly disappointed face” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 67), and her brutally condescending and frank portrayal once again subverts the fairy tale by casting a character dubiously suited to the role of the handsome prince. Ironically, when Ella first meets Mr. Richardson at the Crystal Palace, he is accompanied by a friend of whom we learn little except that his name is “Mr. Prettyman” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 58). This surname cheekily suggests that the friend is “pretty,” which further emphasizes the oddity of the ugly Mr. Richardson as the hero. The narrator muses upon the nature of these modern princes:

What are young princes like now-a-days? Do they wear diamond aigrettes, swords at their sides, top-boots, and little short cloaks over one shoulder? The only approach to romance that I can see, is the flower in their button-hole, and the nice little moustaches and curly beards in which they delight. But all the same besides the flower in the button, there is also, I think, a possible flower of sentiment still growing in the soft hearts of princes in these days, as in the old days long, long ago. (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 58)

This paragraph establishes that the prince also lacks the visual depictions of romanticism, but perhaps his heart rings as true as those princes of ages past. However, the ironic tone the narrator employs suggests the reader might desire more from this prince than merely a “flower in the button-hole” and a wealthy estate. Ella, of course, views the emotional merits of her lover: “As for Ella, she thought how kind he had been on the stairs that morning; she thought what a bright genial smile he had. How charming he looked, she said to herself; no, never, never had she dreamt of any one so nice” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 58-59). She believes him to be handsome because he is quite literally the only young man who has ever been nice to her; she has not yet come out into society. This youthful love stems from ignorance and trustfulness, two qualities Ella holds in abundance, yet “she was quite—more than satisfied, no prince in romance would

have seemed to her what this one was, there actually walking beside her” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 59). Her satisfaction mirrors Cecilia’s contentedness with her monotonous life pre-awakening and Belle in her little cabin with her father. While Cecilia and Belle are removed from the situations they desire, Ella pursues hers. Like the other two heroines, Ella had not thought of marriage until the opportunity was presented to her; however, unlike the others, Ella decides she likes her prince without outside influence or pressure, despite his ugly appearance.

The other male character in this tale is Mr. Ashford, Ella’s father, who is noticeable for his extreme impotence. His ideas and beliefs are entirely influenced by the women in his life: Ella and Mrs. Ashford. He lacks agency and instead gives way to the desires of these women. Even as a child, Ella holds significant influence over her father. “Languid, gentle, easily impressed, Colonel Ashford was quite curiously influenced by this little daughter. She could make him come and go, and like and dislike” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 40-41). Already, Ella has more agency and responsibility than either of the previous two heroines. After remarrying, Mr. Ashford’s life revolves around the wishes of his wife. “Mrs. Ashford had explained life to him in so strangely ingenious a manner that he had got to see it in a very topsy-turvy fashion” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 47). In fact, “poor little Ella had been explained and explained, until there was scarcely anything of her left at all” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 47). Overall, Colonel Ashford remains clinically unaware of the plot unfolding before him. The narrator condemns his ignorance of his daughter’s suffering comically: “Poor little Ella! Refused, scorned, snubbed, wounded, pained, and disappointed. She finished pouring out the tea in silence, while a few bitter scalding tears dropped from her eyes into the teacups. Colonel Ashford drank some of them, and asked for more sugar to put into his cup” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 64). Although he is unable to help her, he does care for his daughter. “He felt vexed with his wife, and sorry for the child;

but he was, as usual, too weak to interfere” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 64). The image of the weak man juxtaposed with two strong women is a striking one. This *Cinderella* story critiques Victorian patriarchy by subverting the gender roles; Ritchie’s version creates a triangle between two women—Mrs. Ashford and Ella—and a man, flipping the gender expectations and placing both women in positions of power over Mr. Ashford, unlike the male-centric dynamic in “Beauty and the Beast.” The comparisons between Ella and Mrs. Ashford serve to comment on vanity and materialism, and the competition between them ultimately reflects on the harmful effects of the patriarchal marriage market and advocates for the increased power of women.

Where Mrs. Ashford is ever considering her appearance and posing, Ella’s natural beauty shines because she does not think of it. Her clothing is “Shabby enough . . ., but she was too happy, too excited, to think about the deficiencies in her toilet” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 55). In contrast, according to the narrator, in her youth, Mrs. Ashford “really was a beautiful young woman, and would have looked quite charming if she had left herself alone for a single instant, but she was always posing” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 36). We first meet Mrs. Ashford, also known as Mrs. Ashford, in the frame story when H. recounts how she and the narrator knew her in Paris. The narrator describes her beauty and elegance yet with an ironic edge that increases as the story unfolds.

She was very poor, and very grandly dressed, and she used to come rustling in to see us. Rustling is hardly the word, she was much too graceful and womanly a person to rustle; her long silk gowns used to ripple, and wave, and flow away as she came and went; and her beautiful eyes used to fill with tears as she drank her tea and confided her troubles to us. (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 35-36)

Her poverty and fine dress suggest Mrs. Ashford has problematic financial priorities, and the comical retraction of “rustling” as a descriptor demonstrates how the narrator struggles to view Mrs. Ashford in a non-judgmental light. Amusingly, the story seems to set Mrs. Ashford up as a potential princess or protagonist of this tale. “H. never liked her; but I must confess to a very kindly feeling for the poor, gentle, beautiful, forlorn young creature, so passionately lamenting the loss she had sustained in Major-General Garnier” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 36). Perhaps this romantic history is what leads to her jealousy of Ella and sets up a one-sided rivalry between them for the affection—and money—of Mr. Ashford. The diction at the beginning of Mrs. Ashford’s story also resembles that of a fairy tale. The narrator recalls, “One day I was walking with her down the Champs Elysées...” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 37). “One day” evokes the “once upon a time” of a fairy tale. However, the paragraph continues and illuminates Mrs. Ashford’s true character: “she suddenly started and looked up at a tall, melancholy-looking gentleman who was passing, and who stared at her very hard; and soon after that it was that she began telling me she had determined to make an effort for her children’s sake, and to go a little more into society” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 37). The lie here—that her desire to go into society is “for her children’s sake”—demonstrates how she reframes her selfishness as altruism. This is made even more apparent with regard to her domestic attendant: “She said once that she would not be doing justice to her precious little ones, to whom she devoted herself with the assistance of an experienced attendant. My impression is, that the little ones used to scrub one another’s little ugly faces ... while the experienced attendant laced and dressed and adorned, and scented and powdered their mamma” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 36). The narrator rather brutally displays Mrs. Ashford’s false courteousness with short commentary and clarifications, frequently using italics to demonstrate the facetious tone in which she views Mrs. Ashford’s dialogue. She

had “hands so white, so soft, so covered with rings, that one felt that it was indeed a privilege when she said, ‘Oh, *how* do you do?’ and extended two or three gentle confiding fingers” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 36). Overall, the narrator’s humorously frank description of Mrs. Ashford contributes to the condemnation of material wealth and vanity that Ritchie began in “Beauty and the Beast.”

As in “Beauty and the Beast,” the narrator plays an active role in Mrs. Ashford’s story and influences its outcome, ultimately creating a worsened situation for the heroine, Ella. The narrator overhears Mrs. Ashford’s conversation with Mr. Ashford: “‘For you, you married the person you loved,’ Lydia Garnier was answering; ‘for me, out of the wreck, I have at least my children, and a remembrance, and a friend—is it so? Ah, Henry, have I not at least a friend?’” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 38). This intercourse recalls the emotional reunion of Jane Austen’s Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, except that here it rings of manipulation and deceit. The narrator chooses to assume the best of Mrs. Ashford at first: “I do not know to this day if she was acting. I believe, to do her justice, that she was only acting what she really felt, as many of us do at times” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 39). Her “acting,” as the narrator states, benefits her and her daughters financially; “Colonel Ashford is in Parliament, he is very well off. I believe you will be making an excellent marriage. Accept him by all means” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 39). In saying this to the future Mrs. Ashford, the narrator acts as the fairy godmother to the villain of Ella’s tale. The narrator’s presence in this story—not in Ella’s portion of the fairy tale—contrasts with that in “Beauty and the Beast,” where she aids the young prince in marrying Belle. Thus, the meddlesome narrator is not always an inculpable party; even in her matching of Belle and Guy, she prescribes the girl to a married life that, as I have stated, restricts her autonomy. The fact that the narrator and H. are single women living together further demonstrates the irony of

her matchmaking. Returning to Mrs. Ashford's tale, her story ends after she tells the narrator of her proposal: "'We are brought together as by a miracle, but our three children will never know the loss of their parents' love,' &c. &c. Glance, hand pressure, &c.—tears, &c. Then a long, soft, irritating kiss. I felt for the first time in my life inclined to box her ears" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 40). The repetition of "&c." reveals the narrator's true thoughts about the soon-to-be bride, and the comically judgmental tone and final admission of the desire "to box her ears" especially displays the tiresomeness of fake, social-climbing types of people. However, the narrator finds some sympathy for Mrs. Ashford despite her failings. "The only excuse for Mrs. Ashford is that she was very much in love with her husband, and so selfishly attached to him that she grudged the very care and devotion which little Ella had spent upon her father all these years past" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 45-46). Here the narrator's perspective perhaps reflects Ritchie's character: according to her friends, Ritchie "was glad, when it was possible, to find some way of regarding people's faults which made them more excusable" (Fuller 7). With such a direct analysis of her motivations and character, we can easily understand Mrs. Ashford, but, bizarrely, she is a much more layered and interesting character than the monotonously good princess. In creating a complex villain and connecting her to both the narrator and a previous heroine, Ritchie subverts the genre by complicating the roles beyond the clear binary of good versus evil.

The main actor in organizing Ella's participation in the marriage market is her fairy godmother, Lady Jane Peppercorne. Lady Jane "was very rich, she had never married, and was consequently far more sentimental than ladies of her standing usually are" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 48). The unmarried fairy godmother plays a matriarchal role of agency: in control of her finances, she can help others and live a life that is relatively unrestricted by men. At first, Lady

Jane's kindness is passive and insignificant yet very meaningful for poor Ella. "Lady Jane Peppercorne, their own cousin, was always noticing her, and actually gave her a potato off her own plate the other day" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 47). Her kindness extends to allowing the Ashfords to stay in her London house as well as, of course, bringing Ella to the Crystal Palace and the ball. "She was very kind as well as flighty, and was constantly doing generous things, and trying to help anyone who seemed to be in trouble or who appeared to wish for anything she had it in her power to grant" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 48). When she becomes aware of Ella's home situation, she says, "I'll make matters straight. I always do" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 54-55). She also helps those of lower status; "They are all workhouse boys, my dear; they came to me as thin and starved as church mice, and then I fatten them up and get 'em situations" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 56). The story ultimately revolves around three women: Ella, Lady Jane, and Mrs. Ashford. Mrs. Ashford continually uses Lady Jane, but Lady Jane's higher rank and social status keep Mrs. Ashford's rudeness in check: "she could not afford to quarrel with Lady Jane until the season was over" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 69). For this reason, Lady Jane is the only person able to bypass Mrs. Ashford in order to bring Ella into society. "They were too much afraid of Lady Jane to object more openly" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 63). In Perrault's "Cinderella," he "stresses at the end in his *moralité* that it's crucial for everyone to have such a figure in their lives—a society patron" (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* 30). In her youth, Mrs. Ashford had this figure in the form of the narrator, and she expects it from Lady Jane, but the latter woman is too smart to fall for her theatrics. "You really *must* forgive me, dear Lydia" (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 69), Lady Jane says to Mrs. Ashford. And, truly, she must—because her social standing depends on it. Another villain in the story, the maid Carter, is thwarted by Lady Jane's presence, and the interaction proves the importance of social and economic rank in

this story. Lady Jane says to Carter: “Go upstairs directly, and do not forget yourself again” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 53). Lady Jane’s position in the story shows the power of social standing in Victorian society, but while the narrator admires Lady Jane’s actions since she was born into her status, she condemns Mrs. Ashford’s social climbing because of its dishonesty. Ella, it seems, avoids this criticism due to her humility and honesty, characteristics that allow her to enter the world of the consumer as a curious and grateful participant.

The Crystal Palace acts as a place of transformation for the heroine, freeing her from her stepmother’s control and introducing her to the wonders of Imperial Britain. The narrator introduces the modern luxuries of innovation early in the story, describing “pleasant palaces tastefully decorated, and with all the latest improvements; with convenient cupboards, bath-rooms, back staircases, speaking-tubes; lifts from one story to another, hot and cold water laid on; while outside lie well-kept parks, and gardens, and flower-beds” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 29). These new inventions hint at the role of the Crystal Palace: a seemingly magical place previewing the finest contraptions England has to offer. The Great Exhibition of 1851 demonstrated new developments in industry and science. An architectural feat in itself, the Crystal Palace served as the setting for the Exhibition, displaying new technologies as well as “impressive displays from other nations [that] reflected the success of Britain’s new free trade policy” (Atlick 11). The narrator describes the Palace: “Music playing, flowers blooming, the great wonderful fairy Palace flashing over head; ... the glitter, the perfume, the statues, the interesting figures of Indians” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 59-60). The Crystal Palace is a place of magic, curiosity, and exoticism, displaying commercial products as well as providing a glimpse into the “other” world outside of Europe. Ella’s naïveté allows her to react without censorship. “Oh, it is so charming! I do not think anything could be so delightful in all the world” (Ritchie,

*Five Old Friends* 60). Ella's presence in the Crystal Palace transforms the purpose of the Exhibition into a location of female metamorphosis, as Laurence Talairach-Vielmas explains:

Ritchie's revision of the fairy tale not only modernizes *Cinderella*, but slightly changes the meaning of the Victorian glass building as well. This time, the Crystal Palace does not incarcerate the female character. On the contrary, if it first anaesthetizes her and subjects her to the male gaze, it next encapsulates the heroine's soaring desire, thereby mirroring female passion through the lens of Victorian consumer culture. In this way, if the heroine remains bound to the fairy-tale scenario, her body seems, nevertheless, to have slipped through the glass. (Talairach-Vielmas 98).

The Crystal Palace becomes a new space in which Ella experiences a social and physical transformation into the fairy-tale princess. She graduates from a life of dusty books to a world of glittery machines. Ironically, the Palace becomes a location of freedom rather than entrapment; unlike Cecilia or Belle, Ella is not stuck within her castle but becomes an agential consumer. Rather than limiting her, the Palace and its glass walls release her from the grip of her stepmother into the world outside—a world that extends far beyond just England. The female gaze prevails in this setting, but at what cost? This pairing of female emancipation with colonial spoils—achieved through subjugation of people abroad and brought to England to amuse upper-class society women—forms a complicated connection between women's agency and imperial triumph.

Despite being centered around the Crystal Palace, a castle cemented in time and location, Ritchie's "Cinderella" adopts and subverts many classic elements of the fairy tale in order to challenge the reader's expectations and create a comical blending of reality and fantasy. This tale often leans into the genre by evoking the childish diction of some fairy tales. Multiple times, the

narrator repeats words in three as one does in stories for young children: “Tumty, tumty, tumty, went the instruments” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 70); “Her heart sank down, down, down” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 51-52); “all of a sudden she burst out sob, sob, sob, crying” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 52). Ritchie does not employ this style of repetition in either “Sleeping Beauty” or “Beauty and the Beast.” Comically, the familiar elements of the tale, such as the midnight deadline for the princess at the ball, are transformed into practical, literal problems: Lady Jane “cannot keep [the driver] Raton, with his bad cough, out after twelve o’clock” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 70). The elements of the fairy tale are obvious—“It was a fairy world: they were flying and swimming in melody—the fairy hours went by to music, in light, in delightful companionship” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 69-70); “The music was like an enchantment” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 69); and “What a fairy tale it was!” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 56). The narrator even expresses that we know the ending of this story: “We all know what is coming, though little Ella had no idea of it” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 66). Thus, the familiarity of the form and the comfortable whimsy of the genre allows Ritchie to play with the reader’s expectations. The climax of the story unfolds as if a horror tale; “the poor little frightened thing” ran through the crowd, asked an attendant for “anything, please” in haste of finding a coat, and “Little Ella, more and more frightened” ran towards the coach in a state of panic (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 70). The fact that this panic is unwarranted is what gives irony to the story; like Catherine Morland of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, Ella envisions a horrific fairy tale around her while, in reality, her situation is quite safe. Exclamations of “O horror!” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 73) and frantic questions race through Ella’s head before “it seemed to her like a fairy chariot coming to her rescue, when a cabman, who was slowly passing, stopped and said, ‘Cab, mum?’” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 73). Humorously, her prince was following her to offer

his aid, and when she leaves behind a diamond buckle from her shoe, the narrator remarks amusedly: “This little diamond buckle might, perhaps, have led to her identification if young Richardson had not taken the precaution of ascertaining from old Lady Jane Ella’s name and address” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 74). Referencing classic *Cinderella* stories in which the sisters “did whatever they could to get their feet into the slipper” (Perrault 189), both sisters try the buckle on their foot when Mr. Richardson arrives to return it, but unlike most evil stepsisters, Julia says, “It is not ours. We must send it back, I suppose” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 74). Further subverting the classic tale, the “glass slippers” do not quite fit this princess: “They were the loveliest little white satin slippers, with satin heels, all embroidered with glass beads; but small as they were, they were a little loose, only Ella took care not to say so, as she tried them on” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 66). At the end of the tale, the narrator reflects on the marriage with one last moment of irony: “Dear little couple; good luck go with them, happiness, content and plenty ... as they drove off in their carriage for the honeymoon, Lady Jane flung the very identical satin slipper after them which Ella should have lost at the ball” (Ritchie, *Five Old Friends* 75). This final subversion of the expectations of the fairy tale provides a comic ending to the story and demonstrates how a Victorian public need not fear the horror and violence of fairy tales mentioned in the beginning of the frame story.

Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s “Cinderella” builds on the subversion of the previous two tales by creating a fantasy steeped heavily within reality, based around the physical and temporal location of the Crystal Palace. As in “Beauty and the Beast,” the narrator of “Cinderella” plays an active role in the tale as friend to the villain. Mrs. Ashford serves as a reminder not to value material objects over kindness and friendship, and thus Ritchie condemns materialism and social climbing again in this tale. Ella represents childhood and kindness in her humble, natural

manners and actions and contrasts with her selfish stepfamily. Ironically, the prince of this tale, Mr. Richardson, is an ugly man who fails to appear as a very sympathetic or interesting hero, demonstrating that the magic of a fairy tale is mitigated in the real world. However, Mr. Richardson appreciates Ella's personality in a way her stepfamily does not, and his love allows her to escape the house of her stepmother and form a household of her own. Through the help of her fairy godmother, Lady Jane, Ella finds her whimsical joy again by the end of the tale and stands up to her evil stepmother. Thus, this tale acts as a story of female emancipation, and Ella is a more active participant in her fate than the other heroines we have examined. Unlike those other princesses, Ella has desires and feelings that she voices, and she is, therefore, the most sympathetic heroine of this thesis. The women of "Cinderella" initiate the plot's action: Ella, Lady Jane, and Mrs. Ashford control the men around them and work towards their desires. Again, this differs greatly from "Sleeping Beauty" and "Beauty and the Beast," in which the men held all the power. Finally, the Crystal Palace plays a large role in this tale, acting as the scene of much of the drama. Ritchie's inclusion of the Crystal Palace merges the expansion of the British Empire with the newfound potential for exploration in Ella's life. By connecting women's emancipation to imperial colonialism, which brings treasures stolen from abroad to England, Ritchie complicates the good-evil binary of the fairy tale. She breaks the magic spell by transforming Cinderella's glass shoe into a glass castle that simultaneously releases Ella and subjugates others. Overall, Ritchie creates female characters who have depth and agency and uses them to demonstrate the problems with the growing material culture and the social falseness of the upper class.

## Conclusion

*“We are all princes and princesses in disguise, or ogres or wicked dwarfs. These histories are the histories of human nature, which does not seem to change very much in a thousand years or so, and we don’t get tired of the fairies because they are so true to it.”*

— Anne Thackeray Ritchie, “Sleeping Beauty”

In examining three of Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s fairy tales, “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “Cinderella,” this thesis aimed to investigate how Ritchie subverts the expectations of the genre to convey morals about Victorian society and gender. In “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,” Ritchie parodies the fairy tale and transfers the princess’s slumber to a state of disinterest, boredom, and apathy. She subverts the *Sleeping Beauty* tale with ironic and comic scenes that disrupt the reader’s expectations and ambiguous characters who fail to inhabit their tropes properly. The story exposes the limitations placed on middle- and upper-class Victorian women, confined to lives of domesticity and matrimony and restricted financially because of their legal dependence on men. The ironic and intimate narration facilitates the flow of these ideas without disrupting the narrative, and the narrator’s comically condescending comments about Cecilia create a flawed heroine who thus challenges the desirability of the ideal Victorian woman, a passive and moldable stereotype. As a parody of this ideal, Cecilia fails to overcome the domesticity she is confined to, remaining in her family home even after marriage and retaining many of her boring attributes. In this tale, Ritchie criticizes parents who raise their children to grow up like Cecilia and instead encourages a different approach to childrearing, especially for young girls. The prince, Frank Lulworth, also holds an ambiguous place in the narrative, acting as both villain and hero, thus ironically subverting his role and leaving little choice for Cecilia in whether to marry him; either way, he inherits her money and property.

Cecilia lacks agency in her financial life and must give herself to a man through marriage to retain her property. Although the narrative seems to promise a “happy ending” for the heroine, Ritchie’s tale prompts the reader to question the society in which marriage is often the only option for a woman.

“Beauty and the Beast” exposes how Victorian England’s financial laws restrict the freedom of women to hold property and thus places them within the control of the men—often fathers or husbands—in their lives. The narrator plays an active role in the tale that obscures the distinction between fairy tale and reality. The tale also denounces materialism, greed, and social climbing in its portrayal of the other members of the Barly family. The story’s heroine, Belle Barly, conforms to the stereotypically ideal Victorian woman in her beauty, selflessness, and kindness, but these attributes lead her to forego her freedom twice in order to save the men in her life: her father and Guy Griffiths. The proposed love interest, Guy, manipulates Belle into marrying him, which corrupts the romantic plot of the tale. Despite Belle’s desire not to marry Guy, she must accept him by the end for financial security and her sense of morality. Guy Griffiths, like Frank Lulworth, is an unattractive hero, confining Belle to life at his castle, ignoring her refusals of marriage, and coercing her into marrying him through guilt and pressure. He expects love from Belle but can *only* offer her his love in return—a love she has expressed no desire for throughout the tale. Since she depends on the men in her life for financial security, Belle must accept Guy’s proposal eventually. “Beauty and the Beast” encourages the reader not to accept the “happy ending” at face value but suggests the unpleasant reality of the patriarchal Victorian society, framed within a familiar fairy tale.

The women in Ritchie’s “Cinderella” take agency in their own lives, and the tale discourages female passivity by boosting a heroine who pursues her own desires and finds joy

outside of society's constraints. The narrator of "Cinderella" plays an active role in the tale, similar to her role in "Beauty and the Beast," except in this story she aids the villain in her pursuit of Mr. Ashford. By playing as a fairy godmother to an unlikeable character, the narrator complicates the story and dilutes the boundaries between good and evil characters. Mrs. Ashford represents the condemnation of materialism and vanity that Ritchie also emphasizes in "Beauty and the Beast," and Ella conversely demonstrates the importance of retaining one's childish curiosity, whimsy, and kindness even in adulthood. As in the previous two tales, Ella's prince, Mr. Richardson, falls short of the handsome, charming hero one might expect from a fairy tale. Ugly and uninteresting, he shows how some magical elements of the fairy tale are lost in the real world. While Mr. Richardson facilitates Ella's escape from her abusive stepmother, Ella remains an active participant in her emancipation because she expresses her desire to pursue Mr. Richardson and attend the ball and works through her limitations by developing the ability to stand up to her stepmother. Lady Jane, Ella's fairy godmother, helps Ella overcome her obstacles and forms one-third of the powerful women in this tale. Ella and Mrs. Ashford complete the trio, exerting control over their lives and influencing the decisions of the men around them, including Mr. Ashford and Mr. Richardson. Lastly, the Crystal Palace forms the center stage for much of the drama of the tale, blending the splendors of empire with Ella's newfound freedom. Ritchie further complicates the distinctions between good and evil in the tale by tying women's liberation to the subjugation of others through imperialism. In all, "Cinderella" builds upon the subversion of the previous two tales and develops stronger female characters that illuminate the problems of material culture and social climbing in the upper class.

Each heroine I have examined has grown in agency and admirability. Cecilia holds no interest nor authority in her life, and Belle succumbs to Guy's manipulation rather than following

her own wishes. Ella surpasses both of the prior two princesses by expressing and pursuing her desires. Additionally, the women in “Cinderella” hold control over the men around them, which completely reverses the power dynamics of the previous two tales. Beyond being simply a pleasure to read, Ritchie’s tales illuminate Victorian society with a keen vision that both admires and parodies the fairy-tale genre. Her literary voice infuses the stories with clever comedy and often devastatingly honest descriptions, allowing the reader to simultaneously make fun of and sympathize with the characters. As Ritchie herself writes in her *Blackstick Papers*, “it seems a pity when books pass away, as they undoubtedly do, delightful books worthy to be remembered” (*Blackstick Papers* 4). I hope that this thesis may bring new attention to Ritchie’s fairy-tale collections so that new adults of the modern era may find themselves sorting their acquaintances into fairy-tale archetypes as Miss Williamson and H. do; hopefully, they will not find too many Bluebeards and will have plenty of fairy godmothers to guide their path.

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