Narratives are a gateway into a vibrant and exciting world, showing ways of self-expansion that inspire the everyday. Immersive narratives are the most exciting, the most thrilling of stories. They use mimetic imagination, which is the power to translate words in a book into fictive and sensorial worlds that immerse the reader in the narrative. I remember reading a specific book, with a red spine and a white cover, even forfeiting breakfast for a chance to finish a chapter before school. As adulthood is imminent, I can't help but romanticize the years I spent as a bookish wild child. My memories of fairytales are as nostalgic as those from reality.

Eventually, my focus shifted from the specific bedtime stories to overriding nostalgia and the portals that reading fairytales open. I wanted to reference the bedtime story environment in a substantive and tangible way by weaving a large blanket on a loom. The red frame represents the gateway of reading, and how it is a portal into lands with infinite potential. The strings filling this frame represent the nostalgia I have when reflecting on my childhood and reading, as well as the nostalgia most adults experience when reading a bedtime story to their child. The landscape that is barely perceived from the frame-side is in full force on the flip side. The vibrant colors and natural imagery demonstrate further a common scene in fairytales, as well as referencing my own childhood and the memories I made, wandering in my own woods, imagining my own beasts.

Abby L.

Fairytales have had a massive influence on my development into this stage of life, so I attempt to consolidate this knowledge into a consumable format. This paper discusses fairytales' transformations into both an adult and children's genre, and their influence on us and our world. I explore what it is to have been an avid reader as a child, and how that affects myself. Most importantly, I struggle with the question, 'How do fairytales shape us?'

I have always loved reading. I ran through those pages, transported through to another world where I imagined myself being a fairy, or the protagonist, or a really cool dragon. I had two older brothers, but they preferred to play with each other over me. I filled my childhood with books—brimming with old stories and fabricated memories of someone else's adventures.

I don't remember being read any books as a child, or learning to read, but I do remember reading. Sitting in my room, being so absorbed in a story I had to finish it *that* day. I had filled my bedroom with books. The hallway, too, was not free from my reading habit. There were books downstairs, under the couch and on the TV and in the cupboards. I was often asked to put them down at dinner and engage socially, reprimanded by my parents. I devoured cereal and books alike before school, on the car ride home, and all through the night. Really good books were the ones that distracted me from school, the ones I wished I could spend all day with. Those were the books that I had to take a break from reading when completed. I needed to process, to regain the emotional capacity that the book had drained me of.

Some books I never understood. Why in the world would the magical protagonist choose to go back to a human reality, forfeiting their powers and magical friends in order to be human? I could never understand their sacrifice. My extensive reading gave me a handle over words. I was 'gifted', in that my reading level was sky-high and I could write intelligibly. I never liked that. I didn't want to excel in reality, I wanted to be stolen away by a fairy or accepted into a hidden, magic world. As I grew up, I accepted that I was not going to be saved from adulthood by Peter Pan, or a letter from Hogwarts. I wasn't going to find a Magic Tree House that would transport me to magical dimensions.

It wasn't that I hated my family, or had a rough social life. Reading was my *thing.* My oldest brother's thing was video games while my other brother had adventuring on lock. We were all fulfilled imaginatively, and I would say that these activities have shaped all three of us in a massive way. I used fairytales and fiction to escape the reality I deemed as boring. Especially in elementary school, the language and history curriculum was lackluster at best, and the entirety of my day was spent at school or at home. I remember taking math classes the most, out of anything I did. I didn't like it, not as much as I liked reading. How could I like numbers, when words enveloped me in magic? Numbers never stood a chance. Once I got home, my imagination would run wild. I would pick up another book or play outside. I chattered to myself as I wandered in the woods. My dog became my trusty dragon steed and I greeted and picked bouquets of grass and dandelions for the hidden nymphs that lived in trees.

Fairytales disappointed me. Reality is still constrained by physics, as am I. Fairytales also entertained me, and influenced the way I think and who I am immensely. Words have power. I learned how to write, how to manipulate people, and how to use my words to incite change. Fairytales spark my imagination, and illustrations inspired me. I've always read, but I wanted to see how fairy tales affected other people. I wanted to know how vital fairy tales were to other children, and how they affected them. How do stories shape us? How do fairytales and children's literature shape children? What is appropriate for a child in a fairytale? What can they 'handle' and what is too much? What do children prefer in stories? How does the presence of a moral in a fairytale change the role the story plays? Are the 'original' versions of these stories better? How?

In order to better understand fairytales' impact on children, we should look at their evolution, and how they came to be a children's genre. Before the mid-1700's, the only books published, especially for children, were instructional or pious in nature (Grenby, The Origins). These books were meant to educate children, because there were new ideas forming around children's needs. The concept of childhood was expanding. Middle and upper class families were

investing in educating their children as expectations for adult knowledge were getting higher. The idea of childhood as a period of training between infancy and adulthood gained popularity with the Enlightenment's emphasis on the increasing intellectual and technical demands of adult life (Thane). Adults were to be intellectually stimulating and technically capable in their area of work with rising economic complexity. In five-point Calvinism, one of the main points is an emphasis on original sin. This idea is total depravity, meaning that sin has affected all parts of man, and man's nature is sinful, which justifies another one of the main points of Calvinism. That point being that Jesus Christ died for not *all* of man's sins, but many. There are those who won't be saved. Total depravity makes this point valid, because if all are sinful at heart, then they deserve eternal punishment (Slick). The total depravity of human nature extended to children, and so if they could be morally educated then they had a chance of redemption. Children required education to become morally upright adults (Thane). This means that childhood was viewed as a transitionary period between infancy and adulthood that emphasized becoming a moral and intelligent adult, capable of contributing to intellectual and economic life. The literature that was exclusive to children reflected these beliefs. In the 1730's, children's literature was still highly educational but now included a "fun" activity, which tried to combine morality and play to better appeal to children (Grenby, The Origins). The first set of nursery tales came out at around the same time, marking the art transition to entertainment education in children's literature that would last centuries.

What is commonly considered as the origin of fairytales are transcribed oral folklore, often told and retold for adult audiences. The Grimm and Perrault tales created a "global storytelling archive" that is sourced again and again for our modern media (Tatar, Fairytales). It's migrated beyond cultures and borders, forming cultural debris and tropes throughout the world. This cultural debris is the fragmented stories that integrate into our vocabulary and influence our culture, especially in minute turns of phrase or a high level of familiarity with the 'gist' of the stories. This archive all started with Charles Perrault and Jacob and William Grimm. Perrault was a French author working in the mid to late 1600's, and set a precedent for the Grimm brothers' work. He was a part of the literary controversy of the Ancients versus the Moderns. Scholars were on either side of this divide but Perrault supported the Modern, which was the idea that as civilization progressed, literature progressed to a higher standard (Charles). This inevitably devalued older literature and media. He transformed the bawdy, 'Ancient' tales that were considered barbaric and coarse into a story with a moral or two thrown in for good measure. His retold folktales became part of Mother Goose, written to amuse children.

The Brothers Grimm picked up Perrault's work in the early 1800's, set on literary careers. They collected folk songs and stories, and published them for children and adults. They "gave fairytales a readable form without changing their folkloric character" (Brothers). This means that they opened up this aspect of folklore that was closed to those who weren't present to hear a story. It took this entertaining sampling of culture and made it widely available for those who could afford to read. These stories were so well-accepted that they've survived, in part, as a global source for fables. As the stories became available to more people, reviewers asked for a moderate version that was more appropriate for children's ears (Tatar, Fairytales). The audience consuming the Grimm Brothers' product were unsatisfied, and so the product was modified to fit consumer tastes. This means that the previous version was considered too gruesome, graphic and mature for children to listen too, even though parents wanted their children to be exposed to these folkloric tales. The tales were edited and made 'appropriate' for children, a trend which follows us into the modern age.

The oral folklore that was transcribed into literary works is reflective of its time: often misogynistic, crude, violent, racist, and xenophobic. These 'origin' stories of modern interpretations weren't considered child friendly, and so they were modified and edited, the often violent and sexual aspects removed (Maggi). Fairytales, especially oral retellings, reflect the cultural views of the time and society they're presently in, so it is not to say that children should be learning the cultural views of Germany in the 18th and 19th centuries. Rather, the violence and fear and vast range of emotions that is present in the adult tales is a key plot device. The scary elements are essential in allowing children to discuss and explore topics that may scare them, and the conversation that follows will be extremely beneficial. Armando Maggi argues in his lecture at the University of Chicago, "Preserving the Spell," that modern versions of classical fairytales are just as valid as the old. The retelling value of stories, he tells us, is essential. This gives the story potential to go in any direction the storyteller desires, whether it be a modern telling of a world with equality or calling back to the roots of oral tradition with violence or morality. This means that no version can be better than the other, because they all hold the *potential* to be altered and modified. This means that there can be a diversity of representation within the classical tales, and that you can include the exciting elements of a story while also modifying it to better reflect your beliefs. The beauty of the cultural debris from our global storytelling archive is that the stories are so ingrained in our popular culture, our familiarity with them so high, that we can freely manipulate these stories and express ourselves through the common thread of the tropes and plots that populate our collective fairytale knowledge.

When a child reads a fairy tale, they are looking for the entrancing excitement that well-written stories exude. What makes a good fairytale is the immersive aspect of its world. Children's literature does a fantastic job of exciting, enthralling, and educating its audience. Powerful fairytales are the ones that "elicit a total emotional response" (Tatar, Fairytales). They do this by creating peak experiences, which are memorable moments constructed from beauty and horror (Tatar, Enchanted). The literature has a perfect blend of gloom and terror, sensory bliss and horror. By walking a fine line between terrifying and comforting, they invoke a visceral excitement within the safety of their pages. Good children's literature will be descriptive and engaging, its complexities drawing a somatic response. Stories are meant to excite and broaden your views. What draws a child to a story is the allure of the words. Reading is the gateway to a forbidden and enchanting world, which has the power to immerse one in the story. Reading fantasy provides a grasp over language and the ability to transform reality with those words. The transformations present in fairytales, such as spells and chants that cause a character to change shape, location, or attitude are quickly realized as imaginary, once attempted by young readers. The falsity of these stories are irrelevant, because the 'once upon a time' marker at the beginning of these tales tells the reader that this is not the here and now, and so that suspension of disbelief is essential to enjoy a tale. "It creates a safe space, especially for children. They get to talk about things that wouldn't have come up otherwise" (Tatar, On Being). It allows a tale to be as expansive and distant from reality as the author wishes because there is an understanding that the tale is not real. It allows the reader to explore ideas and let their imagination wander. It allows a young reader to safely explore the places they'd be scared to wander otherwise and it enables them to talk about things they would ordinarily be afraid to discuss.

Fairytales that are particularly entrancing for children have strong, descriptive imagery. This imagery is so powerful that it has the effect of immersing a child into a story (Tatar, Enchanted). So much so, that often tales produce a mimetic effect. This mimetic imagination is a phenomenon in which one is engrossed so strongly in a story they feel as if they're a part of it

(Tatar, Enchanted). It's the capacity to enter into a fictional world and make it feel real. It does not mean the child identifies with the main character, but rather, their experience is that of a witness, a bystander who can also read the minds of the characters being written about. It's less about copying and more about making contact and participating in a story. It helps produce the visceral reactions and quite real physical sensations that good writing elicits. This mimetic effect allows children to truly experience and immerse themselves in a story. When the story, with its peak sensations, offers a safe place for a child to experience fear and "face down the twin seductions of good and evil" it only adds to the somatic sensations (Tatar, Enchanted). The path a story takes you on can fuel a dialogue about the characters' actions and decisions.

Looking at modern media, there's a return to adult themes within a fairytale. Fairy tales in our modern media are consumed and referenced with little regard for the affect the statement they make has. *Pretty Woman*, a film starring Julia Roberts, uses the plot of Cinderella, but it is respected in the adult world in a way that the original story is not (Tatar, Fairytales). It's respected because it was modified for adult tastes and was re-appropriated to reflect those ideas. This is not only present in film, but in advertising as well. A Pepsi One advertisement featured Kim Cattrall dressed as Little Red Riding Hood, and in the style of goldilocks, she searched for the soda with just the right amount of calories (SubaruXT6). This attempt to take the imagery present in *Little Red Riding Hood* and merge it with the speech pattern of Goldilocks to create an appealing advertisement for a soda was unsuccessful. The advertisement takes and manipulates the stories in such a way that the original themes of the story are twisted and almost patronizing towards the children's versions of these tales. It tries to promote a product that doesn't correspond to the fairytale. This disconnect between fairytale ideas and their actual stories is vastly prevalent in language and advertising. We talk about Cinderella moments, and take fairytales out of context because of the familiarity we have with their stories. This familiarity not only breeds excellent retellings, but opens up an avenue for ridicule of these childish stories. The attempt to recycle these stories into an appealing adult format relies on mocking the values of earlier iterations, reversing and mocking the trust that one places in a narrative when they suspend their disbelief. In adult media and advertising, there is "a parodic idea of wonder" which is used to promote "consumerist fantasies" (Tatar, Fairytales). This technique relies upon the division of adult and child interest, assuming that adults are no longer interested in suspending their disbelief at the 'once upon a time' trigger. Instead, adults are to be cynical and hyper-critical of anything that is deemed as a childish pursuit. This includes having wonder and being excited for stories and cartoons, or enjoying children's fiction. By using a parodic sense of wonder, media dilutes and diminishes the impact that stories have on their readers.

Fairytales have an incredible power to use fantasy as a tool for introducing hardships of reality—the fragmented use of them relies on mocking earlier versions and attempts to diminish the impact fairytales can have on us. Other media also pander to adults utilizing fairy tales: there's a marked increase in the amount of television and cinema for adults with definitive fairytale influence. *Grimm*, a crime television show blatantly draws on intense adult subjects, like violence, sex, and fear, and mixes them with classic fairy tales to create a riveting and complex plot (Tatar, On Being). These nods to childhood reside in television shows like *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*, which is yet another intense drama that spins a tale of complex adult problems and the familiar themes of childhood tales. These are shows based in fantasy and fairy tale, and yet marketed towards adults. The revival of adult-based media that seriously pulls from fairy tales enriches and generates further complexity. This type of media that seriously showcases the power of fairytale enables adults to enjoy the same invigorating tales that they

read as children without the limitations of an impressionable and sensitive audience. This modification of fairytales for adult tastes extends beyond modern media, into the bookshelf and bedtime zone.

The bedtime story is a contact zone between parent and child, facilitated by a novel or short story. To me, this place is a collection of highly idealized moments of nostalgic memories and idyllic bonding over a bedtime story. The contact zone that bedtime creates between parent or guardian and child is a familial tradition. In *Enchanted Hunters*, Maria Tatar writes about the contact space and bedtime. "Embedded in many of today's titles for bedtime reading is the recognition that a story must have a certain soporific power… there is a real eagerness to get toddlers and small children to bed 'on time', even if there is also a strong residual desire to participate in a tradition linked to enchantment and fantasy." This means that, although parents or guardians would like to bond with their children and reap the benefits that reading bestows upon them, the amount of time that is dedicated to this activity is limited. They want their children to go to bed at a certain time, which limits the story they're able to read to their child. Publishers have recognized this trend, especially among families with two or more wage earners, and so "short, sweet, and simple books" are being published (Tatar, Enchanted). These books, with titles like "Go to bed, Fred!" and "Bedtime Stories in Under a Minute", are much less exciting and do not produce the same effects a riveting book does. This includes anticipating reading with the adult, talking about what has happened in the story, and general enjoyment of the bonding rite. When fairytales are modified to be shorter and less exciting, they're reduced and simplified so much that the highly descriptive nature and plot-driven narrative is lost. One of the main reasons a child reads and the cause of one of the greatest benefits of reading children's literature is *excitement*. An exciting story has so much potential for discussion and that discussion is what cultivates a bond with a parent, not the simple act of reading a story. Holding a conversation and explaining words, discussing a characters actions, are where the real benefits lie. Not all story modification has to be negative.

What interested me about the bedtime story is that I never experienced that contact zone between parent and child, where the parent has curated stories they think their child will enjoy, or benefit from. Not to say my parents didn't influence me, but that route was not one they took, and I was left to my own will when picking stories to read. My parents did not curate a set of tales they wanted me to absorb morals from, or fuel my fantastical imagination with, and the act of selectively educating something through the available media is of great intrigue to me. Its propaganda, of sorts, an attempt to organize the beliefs of a child in order to replicate your own or at least produce the desired citizen. This idea of producing a model citizen through literature is reflected in moral tales, which were used in a similar way.

Moral tales started being published in the mid 1700's, and they were designed to deliver a short behavioral or ethical lesson (Grenby, Moral). The 'moral of the story' could be easily summarized in a one-liner lesson, and the characters of the story always benefitted from doing the right thing. These moral tales began to bleed into other vague genres, such as the fairy tale. Perrault wrote morals into French folklore as an attempt to modernize them, and the Grimm Brothers followed suit when their published books lost popularity with parents, due to their graphic and often sexual nature (Johnson). This means that the short fairy tales were easily adapted to fit a moral tale, perhaps due to their ambiguous origins as oral folklore. Fairytales already had a vague morality, but this was so cloaked in euphemisms and 'adult' themes that it wasn't until they were simplified to have a child-appropriate plot and a basic message of morality that they were truly capable of being morality devices. Not to say that all moral tales are

bad, but rather, the ones with clear moral paths do little to educate or excite a reader. Complex moral tales, with characters who have to contemplate and decipher their own moral paths are much stronger (Paton). As Professor M. O. Grenby puts in it his essay, Moral and Instructive Children's Literature, "carefully designed narratives could allow characters, and through them the readers, to learn by their own mistakes, rather than by direct authorial admonition." This means that stories with characters who have to find their moral path and make decisions on their own prompt experiential learning. It says that making mistakes are okay, because they aid personal growth. This self-growth in moral fairytales is why I don't choose to completely and utterly denounce instructive children's literature. It does help to shape identity, although many versions don't fulfill the potential of the moral narrative.

Fairytales have power. To influence us, expand us. They promote empathy, self-growth, and examination of the monsters in reality (Grenby, Fantasy). They help us to understand and relate to the problems of others, by putting us in the shoes of another and exposing us to a variety of issues and people. They help us to grow by showing us ways of self-expansion, whether that be of our perspectives, our abilities and skills, or of our horizons. What is difficult to determine about my experiences with fairytales is whether narratives gave me an escape from a boring life, or made me bored with my reality, especially when the possibilities were endless in the pages of my books.

We have such a separate idea of childhood and adulthood. When I was a kid, I promised myself that when I grew up I would do all of the things I read about in my fairytales and children's books. I wanted to travel, and see the places I read about. This teenage-hood is a strange, middle ground, where I am adult enough to consume media that tells me to abandon my fairytales and look back with nostalgia, and where I am child enough to wish for Peter Pan to take me away. Growing up, I wanted to be an adult. All the heroines of my books were around 17 or 18 when they began to save the world with magic. I was so eager to grow up, to be able to travel and see the exotic worlds where Arabian Nights took place or venture to some icy forest in Russia or Norway. Now, in the transitory period of adulthood, I find myself lost. There are adult concerns, like responsibility and careers and wealth that I am now supposed to consider. I stand at the intersection of the strong faith I had in fairytales and adulthood impending cynicism. How can I reconcile my childhood aspirations and beliefs with my imminent adulthood? Do I ever have to grow up? Why do I idealize being a child? Why is that a place in my life I'm so drawn to? I thought I read for an escape from reality. One option I hadn't considered was that reading stories *enhanced* my reality.

I called my mom a couple of days ago. I had her send me images of the three books I remembered reading most. I knew exactly where they were on my copious shelves and stacks. These were books that I recalled reading time and time again, and they seriously influenced my processes. I remember playing or drawing or writing or singing to myself, and drawing upon the words I had read to create something. What was essential to me was the fuel I had been given in the form of these narratives. I was entranced by the forest I lived in, what was familiar had become unknown and once again I was eager to explore and enter through portals to new lands, lands I created and cast into the world, my speech evaporating to mist as I wandered through my woods. Reading fairytales added a new dimension into my every day. They enchanted the life I was living, rather than diminishing my childhood. This is why I idealized my childhood, why I look back with nostalgia. I relished the times when I could wander around and cultivate my own fairytales, when the only responsibility on my mind was tending to the imaginary dragons who lived behind our playhouse. It was the absolute freedom I gave myself to imagine anything, read

anything, and be whatever I had decided. As I get older, I feel more and more limited by my past experiences defining me.

I want you to look at your own childhood. Your experiences, your hopes, and your dreams. How much of it was influenced by fairytale? How much of you was shaped by your childhood? I want you to remember one book you read as a child, and was viscerally exciting to you. How did it influence your reality? Did it define you?

What is so defining about our past?

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