

**Broken Expectations of Sleeping Beauty in Robert Coover's
*Briar Rose***

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By *Scott Hyder*

Thesis Director
Dr. Debora James

Thesis Advisor
Jim Driggers

Fairy tales contain common elements such as the notion of "once upon a time" or "happily ever after." Within this construct, therefore, characters in the tales have virtually no choice in their actions; they do what they do because they are required by the burden of tradition this genre has created and enforced over the years. In Briar Rose. Robert Coover deconstructs the classic fairy tale Sleeping Beauty, altering both the structure of the tale and the characters in the tale's willingness to live according to predetermined storylines. As characters, including the Prince, the Fairy, and Beauty herself, find themselves acting according to or violating traditions established by the genre, the reader questions not only his or her basic understanding of the fairy tale, but questions larger themes as well, primarily an individual's ability to exercise free will within any given situation.

To understand the different techniques Robert Coover uses in his rendition of Briar Rose opposed to other authors of Sleeping Beauty stories, one must first be familiar with the three oldest Sleeping Beauty stories. The earliest versions of Sleeping Beauty include Giambattista Basile's Sun, Moon, and Talia (1634), Charles Perrault's The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood (1697), and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's The Sleeping Beauty (1812). Each of these are important to Robert Coover's version, Briar Rose (1996) because they set up a background of general knowledge of the traditional Sleeping

Beauty story. It helps if one is familiar with some of the odd and unusual sections of these original Sleeping Beauty stories that Coover borrows for his Briar Rose. Scholar of fairy-tales, Sunje Redies mentions the importance of having a general background knowledge of previous influences of Coover's work in her article, "Return with New Complexities: Robert Coover's Briar Rose" by pointing out, "[T]he reader needs to have internalized a set of rules and conventions of the parodied works or genres, that is, possess a specific competence (which may well be unconscious)" (9). These "conventions" Redies mentions focus mainly on the characters of Sleeping Beauty. For example, the prince is always the hero who saves Beauty with a kiss; Beauty is perfect in every way and hardly remembers anything from her sleep; and any remembered fairies are good with noble intentions. By altering these conventions Coover again alters the readers very expectations of the fairy-tale genre.

In the 1634 Basile version, Talia (Sleeping Beauty) is discovered by a king, who upon finding her asleep does not wake her but instead has his way with the sleeping princess and leaves, "where, in the pressing business of his realm, he for a time thought no more about this incident" (Basile 29). The sleeping beauty gives birth to two children, Sun and Moon. Fairies take care of these two children in light of the princesses' cursed life and father's absence. One of the children happens to find Talia's finger instead of nipple and sucks the splinter of flax out of her finger, awakening the princess shortly before the king returns to Talia's castle. The king is overjoyed to discover Talia awake and his two new children and stayed with them longer this time, later bringing them to his castle to live.

In Perrault's 1697 version, The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, the King and Queen of the story (Beauty's parents) have been desperately longing for a daughter and are finally blessed with one. They are so excited they decide to throw a dinner party for all of the twelve fairies in the land, giving them extravagant gifts of gold and diamonds in exchange for gifts of blessings on their new daughter. However, they neglect to invite the eldest fairy since she has not been heard from in ages and assumed dead. As the eleventh fairy finishes giving her blessing to the princess the forgotten fairy shows up and is so enraged she was not invited, casts a curse on Beauty instead of a blessing. The evil fairy curses Beauty to prick her finger on a spindle of flax as a teenager, which will kill her instantly. However, the twelfth fairy still has a gift to give Beauty. This fairy declares she is unable to reverse the curse, but she can instead alter the curse to prevent Beauty from dying after pricking her finger. The fairy tells the king and queen that Beauty will prick her finger and fall asleep for one hundred years when a prince will then come to awaken her.

The primary difference in the Grimm's version and the previous versions is the socially acceptable moral storyline and ending. This focus on morals shaped the Grimm's fairy-tales themselves as stories primarily focused towards children. Marina Warner, a prize-winning writer of fiction, criticism and history, looks at the Grimm's attempts to make the stories appropriate for children in her book, From the Beast to the Blonde: on Fairy Tales and their Tellers:

Didactic intentions have influenced fairy tales increasingly strongly since the nineteenth century; the Brothers Grimm led the way, as they re-edited and reshaped successive editions of their famous *Household Tales* to improve their

message. Their predecessors had been less anxious about the possible effect on children of tales of incest, adultery, or murder. (294)

The realization of the negative effect of the stories on children, while important to consider, severely cut into the original storylines of each version, leading the way for Disney to appropriately transform the tales for children. The Grimm version also ends with the kiss (another first in the Sleeping Beauty tale), the marriage, and the "they lived very happily together until their lives' end" (Grimm 98), not exactly the "happily-ever-after" alteration used by Disney's fairy tales, but closer than any other version and much more common as well.

Although these original versions of Sleeping Beauty are the most important, when most readers think of any fairy tale today they do not think of Basile, Perrault, or Grimm's; they instead think immediately of Walt Disney. Jack Zipes, critic and teacher of fairy tale origins as a genre, looks at this fact in his article, "Breaking the Disney Spell":

If children or adults think of the great classical fairy tales today, be it *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, or *Cinderella*, they will think Walt Disney. Their first and perhaps lasting impressions of these tales and others will have emanated from a Disney film, book, or artifact. [...] Disney managed to gain a cultural stranglehold on the fairy tale. (333)

Disney's 1959 version of Sleeping Beauty is by far the most common and familiar.

Disney's Sleeping Beauty credited the Charles Perrault version, but had very few commonalities with it. For the most part, Disney created a brand new storyline with a brand new character list. Disney included only three of the good fairies, subtracting nine

from the original texts, and turned the fairy who placed the curse on Beauty into a "mistress of all evil" witch (Walt Disney's Sleeping Beauty). The Disney version was a very closed storyline, spanning only the time from Beauty's birth to her sixteenth birthday where she is pricked by the spindle, put to sleep by the curse, and rescued by the prince all on the same day. Disney's version of Sleeping Beauty lacks the suspense of the older versions because it is lacking in the range of time and the prolonged question of if the prince will rescue Beauty or not.

Disney's alteration of time infringes on the one hundred year curse that first emerged in Perrault's version. It was said the princess would sleep for exactly one hundred years before a prince would find her and free her from the curse of the fairy. It continued in the Grimm version and even in the Disney version of Sleeping Beauty there was a brief mention of the one hundred years that would separate the prince and Beauty when the witch captured the prince after Beauty had already fallen asleep. The witch revealed her plan to the Disney prince after capturing him and chaining him up. The witch explained to the prince that she would keep him away from the sleeping princess until one hundred years had passed. The witch explained that by keeping the prince from breaking the spell for one hundred years, it would prove that true love had no real power since the prince would be old and decrepit when she finally released him, and Beauty would be young and vibrant.

Coover's version goes back to the original stories, taking elements from Basile, Perrault, and Grimm's while adding his own ideas of Sleeping Beauty, creating an intense and elusive world for his three main characters: the prince, Beauty, and the fairy, which is the evil-minded fairy first introduced in the 1697 Perrault version. Even though

the three main characters in Briar Rose are in the same story, they are completely different in their goals and the ways in which they go about achieving those goals. Coover's world of fairy tale confusion engages readers in several different ways by luring them into a seemingly stable and familiar world, rooting them within each character's thoughts and desires and then tearing the "happily-ever-after" curtain away and revealing what happens when the characters are removed from their traditional roles in the story. Before Coover ever introduces any of the three main characters, the reader is jolted by how Coover's story begins. The novel is introduced as the prince is beginning his journey through the briars surrounding the castle in which the legendary Beauty is sleeping.

There is a fair amount of criticism about Coover's choice of beginning the novel in the middle of the Sleeping Beauty storyline opposed to where he "should" [my emphasis] begin in the retelling of this fairy tale. Wexelblatt, a critic of fairy tales and their alternative uses, takes the basic points of the familiar story of Sleeping Beauty and outlines the prescribed ABC structure of Sleeping Beauty's six most general plot steps in his article, "Fairy Tale Time":

A = the princess's birth (the party, the curse)

B = the burning of all the spinning wheels in the kingdom

C = the princess pricking her finger and falling asleep at age fifteen

D = the prince breaking through the hedge of briar roses

E = the prince kissing Beauty and everybody waking up

F = the wedding of Prince Charming and Sleeping Beauty (94)

However, before we can arrive at the happily-ever-after, or 'F' ending of the Basile version, Beauty must first face the jealous wife of the king who awakened her. This jealous wife attempts to cook and serve the illegitimate children to the king himself. The jealous wife is unaware the cook saved the children and cooked two lambs instead. The jealous wife then builds a huge fire that Beauty is to be thrown into (what I will call step 'G'). The king arrives back from his hunting trip at the very last second to save Beauty from the fire. The king is about to throw his jealous wife and the cook into the fire when the cook reveals he saved the children from the wrath of the jealous queen so only the queen is killed for her actions (what I will call step 'H'). Surprisingly, in the Perrault, version we are introduced to the evil ogress mother of the prince who rescues Beauty. This ogress mother goes through with the exact same plan as the jealous wife in Basile's version (step 'G'). The cook once again saves the children from being cooked but this time the ogress mother discovers the cook's betrayal and plans to throw all of them into a large tub full of a variety of serpents. Beauty's prince in the Perrault version also returns from his hunting trip and saves the cook, Beauty, and their children, foiling the ogress mother conveniently at the last moment (step 'H').

The Grimm Brother's version on the other hand, follows Wexelblatt's plot line to the dot because it shortens the Basile and Perrault story severely by cutting out any mention of Beauty having children, as well as any mention of the prince having family. Maria Tatar, a widely acclaimed fairy-tale scholar and critic looks at the reasons the Grimm brothers may have made these large alterations for their own version by pointing out that when the Grimm brothers translated the tale there were certain "taboo" [my emphasis] subjects of the time they strayed away from. Tatar states the Grimm brothers

"did their best to eliminate from the collection through vigilant editing [...] references to what they coyly called 'certain conditions and relationships.' Foremost among those conditions seems to have been pregnancy" (367). The Grimm's version does not fall apart without the inclusion of Beauty's children, or her adulterous rescuer, but does end quite suddenly, eliminating many big events from the previous versions of Sleeping Beauty.

Coover breaks Wexelblatt's commonly known storyline expectations by, not only beginning at the step of C (the princess pricking her finger), but by also keeping the entire action of his novel between the steps of C and D (the prince breaking through the hedge of briar roses). Coover does not disclose the one hundred year old curse the princess is suffering from, nothing of the party in the beginning, nothing of the evil fairy at the party casting the death curse on Rose, or the good fairy who altered the curse to a hundred year sleep and nothing of the spinning wheel Beauty encountered in her late teens that put her to sleep. This intrusion on the middle of the story shakes the reader up a bit but in no way limits the reader's understanding of the previous, or forthcoming action, due to the timelessness of the tale Wexelblatt eludes to. Coover reveals to the reader right away that this is not the average Sleeping Beauty tale, somewhat preparing the reader (though not to the full extent) for a different kind of fairy tale where the traditional, expected rules do not apply.

Coover also breaks the expected rules by including a higher sense of sexuality and harsher situations than in the original texts, which were already much darker in nature than the watered down Disney version of Sleeping Beauty. Coover's beginning is one example of his use of sexual references, something Sleeping Beauty stories have strayed

away from since Grimm's. The prince in the beginning of Coover's version is "surprised to discover how easy it is. The branches part like thighs, the silky petals caress his cheeks. His drawn sword is stained, not with blood, but with dew and pollen" (1). This very sexual opening immediately implies Coover's Sleeping Beauty tale will bring forth forgotten elements of the tale. Contemporary American literature critic Jaroslav Kusnir comments on Coover's use of sexuality in Briar Rose, claiming the sexual situations of Beauty's dreams symbolize her "wish to be mature and not innocent (physically, or sexually), complicated rather than simple, sexual, experiential rather than platonic, corrupted rather than innocent" (47). However, Kusnir overlooks the fact that no actual sexual acts take place in the main storyline; the only sexual situations occur within the Fairy's stories (Beauty's dreams). Kusnir doesn't point out that Beauty's dreams are not so much dreams but instead stories fed to her by the evil Fairy. Kusnir also overlooks Beauty's disgust at these horrible sexual dreams and claims that the Fairy is getting the stories wrong because "it doesn't sound right" (Coover 41). While Kusnir may overlook this detail, the fact still remains that Coover's Briar Rose is much more sexual in nature than its sources.

Coover begins to focus on the characters and make it obvious that Briar Rose is focused more on the characters themselves, and their struggle against the traditional roles than anything. These traditional roles have been placed upon the characters over time through the basic expectations of the fairy tale genre and the Sleeping Beauty tale in particular. The prince goes into the briar fortress knowing he is the one who is destined to rescue the princess from her cursed sleep. The sound of his predecessors' rattling bones hanging among the entangled briars is no match for his certainty that he is the one

who will save the princess and he is even surprised at how easy his task will be. "He, the chosen one, as he presumes (I am he who will awaken Beauty!), pressing valiantly through the thickening briar hedge, hacking without mercy at the petals that so voluptuously caress him" (Coover, 14). Coover takes our preconceived ideas about how the story "should" go and presents us with a strong sense that this is the prince who will make it through the flowering briars, just as the only other prince we have ever known in our readings of Sleeping Beauty was able to make it through untouched.

A few pages later Coover begins to rip at the fairy tale veil he has placed over our eyes when the prince enters the room Beauty is sleeping in, goes to her, and leans in for the kiss before it is revealed that we are experiencing a day dream of the prince as he is busy hacking away at the briars. After this abrupt change in setting, Coover introduces the idea that perhaps our prince is doomed after all,

Did he, distracted by the heady blossoms, make a wrong turning, and is he now circling the walls instead of moving towards them? It is impossible to tell, he is utterly enclosed in the briars, could not see the castle turrets even were they still overhead, which, he feels certain (clouds have obscured the moon, all is darkness), they are not. Perhaps, he thinks with a shudder, I have not been chosen after all..

.Perhaps I am not the one. (22)

Though the prince makes it through this brief period of questioning his destiny. Coover effectively shakes our original belief and quickly raises a question. What if this is not the prince destined to relieve Beauty from her curse? The idea that Beauty is to sleep for exactly one hundred years brings up a lot of questions about whether this is or is not the right prince. Because if Beauty is cursed to sleep for one hundred years no matter what,

as mentioned in a few of the evil fairies stories to Beauty, then no prince arriving prematurely will be able to release her from the curse. Therefore no prince would be able to make it through the briar hedge if he was not the one destined to come after one hundred years

Through alternating chapters of each character's point of view, we also begin to see Beauty and her dreams, which are provoked and led by the fairy assigned to keep Beauty clean and entertained during Beauty's sleep. It is through these dreams that Coover uses many elements from the older versions of Sleeping Beauty by expanding on them, transforming them into Beauty's dreams. Here Coover also introduces the reader to a few ideas that are never discussed when reading Sleeping Beauty, "how [Beauty] will look and smell after a hundred years, lying comatose and untended in an unchanged bed [...] the fairy herself will see to that, is obliged to, must freshen her flesh and wipe her bum, costume and coiffure her, sweep the room of all morbidity" (7). The idea of a fairy who is required to keep and care for Beauty is a relatively forgotten idea that was briefly introduced by Perrault in his 1697 version of Sleeping Beauty, The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood. Redies looks at this in her article from Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies by mentioning the "idea of Rose being entertained by the fairy in her dreams goes back to Perrault's version of the tale" (18). This is important because it shows that Coover did not create every single element in his reworking of Sleeping Beauty that may seem strange or new to most readers who are only familiar with the Disney version of the tale and are only expecting those events. These events add onto the effect Coover gives of breaking tradition and compiling elements of all stories into one unified story.

The fairy plays the most important role in Coover's version of Sleeping Beauty because it is the fairy who narrates and drives most of the action, giving us a fiill glimpse of what Beauty is going through during her one-hundred year sleep. Coover takes the old idea of Beauty waking up to a prince who is already married in his version of Sleeping Beauty as well. Coover throws in the idea of the wife being an ogress on top of this, as the mother was in Perrault's version. The dream-spinning fairy simply ignores Beauty's objection to this story as a change in the times and assures Beauty that "being from the last century, she was probably a bit old-fashioned, while he was a modern prince with different ideas, and anyway she had no choice" (Coover, 50). While Coover borrows this storyline from the older texts, adding in the fact that Beauty has no real choice in the end since she is locked into her own story and at the mercy of the fairy's tales. Coover alters this idea by having the ogress wife actually cooking Beauty and the prince actually eating the meal since he "was also very hungry" (50). While this dream is horrible in its nature, it works for the fairy's advantage; Beauty is now even more nervous about waking up to a world where she will be severely out of place

We see the evil fairy weaving new tales of horror for Beauty about other sleeping princesses who woke up to find the world had changed so much, or they were in such bad situations because they woke up, that they would have been better off remaining asleep: "But that's *terrible!*" Beauty says in reply to one of the fairy's tales, "She would have been better off not waking up at a///" (Coover 20). Evenson, an expert on Robert Coover, looks at the Fairy's desire to keep Beauty wanting to be asleep, fearing the outside world. "Indeed, the Fairy would prefer it if Briar Rose never woke up" (Evenson 235). The only purpose the Fairy has is to keep Beauty entertained with her stories

within Beauty's dreams, and these dreams are molded into a smorgasbord of unhappy endings and mismatched awakenings that should never have taken place:

[The Fairy] has imagined, and for Rose described, a rich assortment of beauties and princes, obstacles, awakenings, and what-happened-nexts, weaving in a diverse collection of monsters, dragons, ogres, jests, rapes, riddles, murders, magic, maimings, dead bodies, and babies, just to watch the insatiable sleeper wince and gasp and twitch with fear and longing, wicked fairy that she is. (56-57) Without Beauty to entertain and create stories for, the fairy would be free from her obligation to Beauty. However, if Beauty is rescued from her curse, the Fairy will have no reason to continue being, reinforcing Coover's critique of the traditional roles of characters in the fairy tale genre.

Coover also events new situations for beauty to experience in her sleep: incest, bestiality, and dragons are just a few things Beauty must face in Briar Rose. Every dream Beauty has in Coover's version adds to his critique of the characters' burden of tradition and lack of control outside of their fairy tale roles. One new situation Coover presents through Beauty's dreams is her awakening by three men at the same time. "Beauty woke up and found not one prince beside her bed, but three: a wizened old graybeard, a leprous hunchback with a beatific smile, and the handsome young hero of her dreams" (41). Beauty is forced to choose which one she will spend the rest of her life with as they list off their qualities and the faults of the others. Beauty must choose while remembering that beauty is only skin deep, age equals wisdom, while also considering the prince is the man of her dreams and whom she desires more than anything. This moral dilemma Beauty is faced with in her dream is looked at by Evenson's study of Briar Rose and how

the fairy "directs the dreams, adding moral lessons to them" (233). However, Beauty makes no decision in this dream; she once again dismisses the dream as a situation that is not right.

Coover's Beauty realizes it is the evil fairy that originally cursed her to sleep for one hundred years that's now in charge of her care. Beauty realizes this through her interactions with the fairy in her dreams, "[y]ou really are very wicked" (Coover 41). Beauty decides after another misguided dream. The prince also credits the evil fairy for his grim situation, wondering if his sleeping princess even exists or if the whole ordeal is just a game of the evil fairy. "[P]erhaps it is only the bad fairy who set this task for him and for all these dead suitors, defined their quest with her legendary spite and spindle, this clawing briar hedge the emblem of her savage temper, her gnarled and bitter soul" (Coover 29). The prince goes on in this same section to question whether the legend of the sleeping princess he was told is more "briar than blossom", trapping and killing more noble princes than she's really worth.

Coover alters the fairy in his version of Sleeping beauty severely by giving her the knowledge that she is in control of Beauty's reality as well as her own. "[T]he fairy knows and uses her frequent advantage, though just how it actually works is something of a mystery to her, one [...] for fairies, to desire something is to possess it" (33). Coover's fairy has full realization of her power and uses it to her advantage against Beauty to fulfill her own desires to experience emotion. One other difference in Coover's evil fairy is that she wants to feel the emotions through which Beauty is going. The fairy slowly realizes that the only way she can do this would be to "take Rose's place in the bed and receive her prince (unlike Rose, she *can* learn, *would*), she knows she might lose power over her

spell and either reveal herself prematurely or get trapped in her new role with no way to escape it. In a sense, omnipotence is a form of impotence" (33). The fairy, in order to do this, would be forced to give up the very power she is so accustomed to and used to.

Without this power, Coover implies, she would lose a sense of who she once was, the role she once held in the story, and forever be trapped in the same situation as Beauty

Beauty herself is altered the most during Coover's story, the Fairy goes on telling stories and the prince continues slashing away at the briars. Beauty, on the other hand, is continuously affected through her dreams, slowly realizing she is in a repetitious state of dreaming. She begins to hope she is experiencing a new event but realizes that "more likely, she is still asleep and dreaming, this [is] merely another of the old crone's wicked entertainments" (73). Beauty realizes she has very little, or no control over the dreams the fairy invents for her and the dreams have a strong influence on how Beauty pictures the world, "The image of dreaming and sleep become central metaphors which construct the transspatial and transtemporal allegorical identity of the Princess" (Kusnir 44). Because of this forced identity, the princess is exposed to a wide variety of worlds, characters, and events that alter her conception of the real world, which again is the whole purpose of the evil fairy's tales. Beauty's realization of her "entertainments" also enforces Coover's role bending quality. This occurs because in all other versions Beauty is the same when she wakes up from the curse as when she falls into the curse. Coover's Beauty on the other hand experiences a wide variety of events in her sleep that will forever alter her state of mind.

These dreams are all the princess knows, all she has to interact with, and all she can rely on during her one hundred year sleep. Beauty experiences many frustrating

events through her dreams. From stubborn princes to odd sexual experiences, Beauty realizes that she has no choice in the matter and all she can do is wait for her awakening. This helplessness causes Beauty to grasp onto the fairy's twisted stories even more, continuing the circular motion of her despair and hope for her real-life prince to rescue her from the curse.

But is it possible that Coover's style may hinder Briar Rose for the reader, with its many prince-to-the-rescue sequences and repeating dream-like feeling? Irving Malin, a critic of American literature, states Beauty's dreams could confuse the reader, "The [dreams] become repetitive - - indeed, they almost interrupt the narration" (16). This occurs because the reader is hoping each time is the time the prince will really be there, the reader expects the story to end in a happily-ever-after style with the prince and a kiss even after the many exposed dream sequences. Coover's constant interruption of the traditional fairy tale outcome does not necessarily interrupt the novel, but instead only adds on to Coover's intention of showing our dependence on the role of a fairy tale. By seeing his or her expectation fail over and over this expectation slowly begins to break down, furthering the readers' enjoyment of Coover's Briar Rose.

Throughout the story, Coover has slowly revealed the idea that the characters are only performing their actions, having their dreams, or continuing their quest because of the fairy-tale genre that is set up around them. The prince is no doubt the best example because he is the only character in the story truly on a life-or-death journey which will either lead him to supposed happiness or lead him into the welcoming branches which are already singing a song of previous victims.

Though he no longer even wishes to reach her, to wake her, he continues, compelled by vocation, to slash away at his relentless adversary, whose deceptive flowers have given the object of his quest the only name he knows. Though she remains his true love, salvation and goal, the maker of his name, jewel at the core, and all that, he cannot help but resent her just a little for getting him into this mess, which is probably fatal. (58) The prince has no free will; the idea of turning back does not enter his mind, he desires to go on, and he must go on, even if it means giving his life for a futile purpose. Even though he begins to realize this quest will probably result in his death, he cannot refuse the predestination influence placed on him by the tradition, and in this case, burden of the fairy-tale situation he is placed in. "[t]he fairy tale - - its structure and its mythmaking - - control the character in assigning him a part that doesn't allow for individuality" (Redies 15). The prince's compulsion to fulfill his quest is controlled by the structure of the fairy tale, opposed to his own true desire to keep going, facing what may inevitably be his own death.

Even though these characters are forced to go on by the rules of the fairy-tale they, in a sense, never completely give up hope because of these rules. Due to their set fairy-tale roles they seem to have a strong sense that they can succeed; Coover's characters seem to know the typical rules of the fairy tale. Redies reinforces this by looking into the original versions of Sleeping Beauty and the fact that the "prince appears because it was predicted he would. All other princes were therefore destined to fail. The same applies to the prediction that the princess will prick herself on a spindle" (Redies 11). This opens up the ultimate possibility that the prince we have traveled with in

Coover's Briar Rose may indeed be the wrong prince, destined to fail and remain as a reminder of predestination for a future prince whose destiny really is to rescue the princess from her curse. Even though this may be so, the prince in Coover's tale never grasps this idea and, in turn, never gives up. All three characters' hope may dim at times, but in the long run all three characters are trying, and still gripping on to the hope that they can sway the story to some type of ending. They are all trying, in different ways, to bring around the "happily-ever-after" part of the fairy tale.

Because of this, the prince, Beauty, and the fairy all become greedy in their individual desire to bring the story to an end: the prince wants to make it to the castle and finally make a name for himself, the princess wants to escape her cursed sleep and experience the "happily-ever-after" she has waited for and was foretold to have, and the fairy wants to keep Rose asleep so she will continue to have a purpose. Evenson argues "the prince wants to achieve the object of his quest [...] the princess simply wants to awake to find romance and to live happily ever after [...] the fairy wants to protect her ward from the buffetings of the world, but mainly she wants to keep whiling away the centuries with her stories" (237). By focusing on themselves they begin to lose sight of why they are in their prescribed situations and lose sight of the set role they are traditionally burdened to fulfill whether they like it or not, which is Coover's main intention, also breaking down the fairy-tale expectations of the reader.

This influence of genre tradition continues throughout the novel until the point where even the prince begins to become lost in his own dreams of the "happily-ever-after" he hoped to achieve. And just when it seems as if the prince has finally reached his quest's end, and joined Beauty in her bedchamber, we are again pulled from a dream

world and thrown back into the briar garden. It is in this way that Coover's Briar Rose "expresses a desire to overcome the traditional, old sensibility, represented by old narrative forms; and at the same time, [...] establishes a new sensibility and new approach to reality and its representation" (Kusnir 47). The traditional expectations of the Sleeping Beauty story are not being met and Coover does this on purpose in order to reveal new possible approaches to the story and an ultimate higher appreciation of Coover's Briar Rose.

The prince ultimately joins Beauty in a sense because he begins to be included in this false dream world. Michael UpChurch, critic of different uses of reality in fiction, looks at the dreaming state of life these two characters share, "both the castle-bound princess, waiting to be awakened from her hundred-years sleep, and the prince, tangled in a briar thicket while trying to reach her, inhabit a shape-shifting dream in which everything has a 'double life'" (5). Nonetheless, the Prince does not lose hope even at the end of the novel when it is pretty obvious he cannot make it to the castle in his condition. The prince awakens from his dream realizing, "it is not the castle, nor the princess inside (perhaps he will reach her and disenchant her with a kiss, perhaps he will not; it matters less than he'd supposed), but this flowering briar patch, hung with old bones, wherein he strives. I am he who awakens beauty, the Beauty" (Coover 84). The prince, along with Beauty ultimately experiences the happiest parts of their lives, and the happiest part of the novel, inside their own head. Coover gives a final blow to the idea of the traditional character role by placing the happily-ever-after part of the fairy tale inside the characters own fragile dreams.

Coover's Briar Rose ends in the same manner as it began, which is incomplete according to the traditional Sleeping Beauty tale. Coover's novel has no real conclusion and is instead circular in its form. The novel ends leaving the characters in the exact same places they began, the prince slashing through the briars, Beauty asleep in the castle, and the evil fairy entertaining Beauty. Because of the lack of gratification in a true ending, there is a strong sense Coover is toying with the reader. Coover is acknowledging that by altering the traditional style of the fairy tale the reader may be left unsatisfied. Modern and contemporary fiction scholar and critic, Robert McLaughlin identifies this idea of Coover being responsible for completely altering "our notions of identity when beginnings are ambiguous, quests are never fulfilled, desire is never gratified, and events never progress but forever repeat" (272). There is no traditional ending in Coover's Briar Rose, which works very well with his choice of altering the beginning point of the story.

Coover breaks the expectation that the story should come to an all-around, nice and neat close and, in turn, never fully satisfies the reader in the traditional sense, even though there is a sense of conclusion and still a glimmer of possibility of the "happily-ever-after" for the characters. As Richard Anderson, professor of postmodern studies, looks at in his book, Robert Coover this is Coover's style of writing: "Coover focuses his attention on reinterpreting familiar stories, which have been traditionally revered for the human truths they contain, and emphasizing the variety of technical and imaginative possibilities available when art and life are free from limiting conventions" (142). Coover works very hard to remove the expectations of traditional fairy tale character

roles and does a very effective job in doing so, as well as shaking the reader from several expectations of the Sleeping Beauty tale.

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