

Sleeping Beauty Wakes Up and Franco is Dead: What Now?

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While many people through the years may have viewed the fairy tale as simply innocent entertainment for children, clearly the didactical element, for which the genre has come under more recent attack in the twentieth century, is more than a recent phenomenon. Odber de Baubeta, in fact, says that “Göttner-Abendroth’s influential study *Die Göttin und ihr Heros* (1980) argued that fairy tales reflect the practices and customs of prehistorical societies, which were in her view ‘primarily matriarchal societies’” (134); while Haase argues that “Zipes’s sociohistorical analysis [examining Basile’s, Perrault’s and the Brothers Grimm’s versions of *Cinderella* ...] consists in the manner in which they continue to transmit residues and traces of the matrilineal tradition” (15) and “the fairy tale becomes a coded text in which the female voice, despite the attempt by men to control it, not only continues to speak but also speaks a secret, subversive language” (16).

More clearly evident, however is that the fairy-tale, as a genre, has traditionally been a means of promoting the patriarchal society through a quasi-cultural “brainwashing” of innocent minds, in particular young girls. As Haase, in his Preface to *Fairy Tales and Feminism*, affirms, “Awareness of the fairy tale as a primary site for asserting and subverting ideologies of gender is evident throughout the genre’s history” (vii) and “Clearly, there has long been a tacit awareness of the fairy tale’s role in the cultural discourse on gender” (viii). In twentieth-century Spain, however, re/written versions of the fairy tale were also frequently used by feminists as a means of subverting the masculine dominance and the male gaze through the females wresting of power from the men and constructing their own version of reality. Well noted are the works by Carmen Laforet, Carmen Martín Gaité, Ana María Matute, Ana María Moix and Esther Tusquets, among others, in which the Spanish women writers protested the patriarchal society imposed on them during the Franco regime. And while Spanish women still may not have achieved enough gains to render discrimination a moot point of discussion, the question now is: is the fairy tale still being used as a means of cultural and gender subversion within a more democratic society, or is it more reflective of the changes and progress which have occurred within Spain since the death of the dictator.

In order to begin answering that question, I propose an examination of Alonso de Santos’ 1994 version of *Sleeping Beauty*; obviously undertaking an analysis of all the versions/iterations of all fairy tales is beyond the scope of any academic essay, but this particular story provides a solid point of departure for the discussion since *Sleeping Beauty* is a prototypical—and didactic—narrative of the silencing of women’s voices.¹ Clearly, Alonso de Santos’ version is not authored by a female, but even still the possibility for both a potentially gender-subversion and reflective nature to the work does exist. As well, Alonso de Santos’ work is an adaptation of the fairy tale, adhering fairly closely to the original story line, while the works by the aforementioned Spanish women writers are rewrites, with substantial changes in characters, setting, and plot. Having said such, it should be noted that *Besos para la Bella Durmiente* does differ somewhat from the earlier versions by Basile, Perrault and the Grimm brothers and purports to be representative of the time period of its writing: “Por lo regular, muchos son los textos necesarios para conseguir

ese caldo de cultivo del que han de brotar las obras representativas de un tiempo, de una época” (9). The Campo de Marte collection, of which this work is the first book, “alienta ese compromiso que da sentido a todo combate. Porque de lo que se trata aquí es de combatir, de abrir una nueva vía en apoyo de una de las vigas maestras de nuestra cultura: el teatro” (9). One can surely suppose then that one of the main purposes of the Asociación Española de Teatro para la Infancia y la Juventud—the promulgators of the Campo de Marte series, of which Alonso de Santos’ work is the first installation—is to promulgate literature which, while reflecting contemporary society, also reflects the more combative element of literature fighting for social change.

Additional reasons for choosing this particular version also include the fact that José Luis Alonso de Santos was born in Valladolid, Spain in 1942, and he thus was born and educated in a system in which girls and boys were separated for Francoist socialization and gender indoctrination.² Moreover, the work was published in Spain in 1994 after the onset of postfeminism,³ and the publisher openly espouses the didactic content of this first volume of the Campo de Marte series, “Una colección joven para los jóvenes de hoy. En ella pretendemos recoger los más sobresalientes textos que se escriben en lengua hispana. [...] Libros que, por su temática y tratamiento, son fundamentales en la nueva *Reforma* escolar” (7). That is, an analysis of *Besos para la Bella Durmiente* provides ample opportunity to examine the predominance of a patriarchal, feminist, or post-feminist ethos—in correspondence to the cultural facets and phases of the Spanish society in which it is birthed—and permit the critics to begin to extrapolate those conclusions to other fairy tales in contemporary Spain. Such, then, should assist in determining if the fairy tale remains a subversive form of indoctrination for young Spaniards or if a better descriptor of the genre is that of “reflector of society.”

Perhaps the initial, most striking difference between Alonso de Santos’ text and more traditional versions of *Sleeping Beauty* is the narrative structure. Traditionally, the story has been written in prose, but *Besos para la Bella Durmiente* is theater—sixty-five pages—written in poetic verse. And while there is no consistent rhyme scheme throughout the entire work, it is primarily arte mayor (11 or 14 syllables) with rima consonante that varies between *encadenada* and *gemela* although there are occasional blank verses, *rima asonante*, or *rima continua*. These changes in rhyme scheme and/or meter, it should be noted, frequently parallel a change in speaker, although such is certainly not always the case. At any rate, even the stage directions are written in poetic verse.⁴

As well, the plot structure—while obviously based on traditional versions of *Sleeping Beauty*—contains parts remarkably different from those and thus shows an influence of contemporary society. In short, the work begins with the king and queen upset and complaining because they don’t have a child. Coming to the realization that even the most lowly servant has a lot of children, the king orders in the closest worker. Upon questioning, the peon in question educates the king in matters of procreation, and nine months later a daughter is born. At the celebratory party, the uninvited, Hada Mala just shows up and curses her to sleep forever, saying that “con algo se pinchará” (38), but the Hada Buena changes the curse, stating instead that a prince’s kiss will wake her. At the age of 12, the princess is stabbed by a rose thorn, goes to sleep, and is awakened by the kiss of a page who has clandestinely entered her room. Since the princess believes that the king will not allow her to marry a page, they agree to conceal the awakening

until the morning when the page, disguised, enters the palace and “wakens” the princess. The ruse is soon discovered, however, but the story ends happily ever after when the bad fairy instantly transforms the kingdom into a non-reality, and everybody—free from the constraints imposed upon them by their lot in society—can now follow the dictates of love, kissing for all eternity.

As Alonso de Santos’ story is a close rewriting of the original version of *Sleeping Beauty*, there are elements of the traditional fairy tale in this work.⁵ Patriarchy is substantially important: the masculine voice is the strongest; the king is still very much the authority figure with the servants obeying him, and the queen and princess assume a lesser role. The king orders the worker to be brought in, and when the king learns the secret to procreation, and decides to implement it, he is the one who orders the lights out so that the experiment can be conducted. Furthermore, even the narrative structure of the work—while perhaps not corresponding to the reader’s usual expectation and in parallel with the previous criticism by Goldberg as theater being a potential instrument of subversion—does also reflect a traditionalist stance, reflecting the techniques of memorization required by the performance nature of the oral tradition.

At the same time, however, the feminist element is also prevalent in Alonso de Santos’ *Bella Durmiente*: the princess’s voice is not silenced by sleep (41) and when she awakens, she is the one who first vocalizes to the page that she will pretend to continue sleeping until he returns the next day, disguised, to awaken her (66), and she is the one who finally has to order the page to leave because dawn is breaking (66). And when the story has changed, and the kingdom transformed (by a *female* fairy, I might add) so that the princess and page can marry, the princess continues her subversion of masculine control and orders the page “un beso muy dulce me darás cada hora” (81), supposedly for ever after. As well, the queen, although sometimes seen to be subject to her husband’s dictates, does express a certain feminist mentality in that she is who orders the servants to see if there are other pretenders (i.e., men whose kiss may awaken the princess) when the two quarrelling horsemen leave, thereby permitting the entrance of the page (72). The queen also complains because the king’s kiss has never awakened her (73), and she is the first to recognize, and vocalize, that the one who has “awakened” the princess is, in fact, the page (74). Furthermore, she shows no hesitancy in expounding to the king his ignorance and weaknesses in certain areas, alleging that he is little more than just another king in a deck of cards: “¿Qué sabes tú de niños? ¡Eres el Rey de / Espadas, de Bastos y de Copas, pero de niños nada! / ¡No es un soldadote! ¡Y no tiene bigote! / ¡Una hija no hace caso de un Rey tan monigote!” (28).

Furthermore, the fairies also represent—and execute—a feminist subversion of the patriarchal impositions: immediately upon the king’s declaring the page exiled and the princess back to the bedroom, and the chamberlain’s “Así que todos a casa / que aquí ya nada más pasa: / ¡Este cuento se ha acabado!” (76), the Evil Fairy—who has disguised herself to watch the kiss—reveals herself and declares: “¡Alto! ¡Que esto acabe así / no lo voy a consentir!” (77) and takes control of the situation so that the page and princess can marry. To succeed in such, she carries out her threat of “puedo deshacer todo esto / y convertírtelo en nada” (79), making the palace cardboard, the crown tin, the scepter brass and the rest into mere theater props. After this transformation, and the subsequent realization by all that the patriarchal society has been totally overthrown and all are free to love, and live, as they choose, the fairies themselves each grab a

horseman—who have now come back on the scene—and demand “dándome tus labios, ven” and “¡Y tú, llega hasta mi lado!” (83).

However there are also elements of the postmodern within *Besos para la Bella Durmiente*. As Irvine notes, parody and humor are important foci of interest to the postmodernist (Soliño 70), two items of particular mention by the author in his notes for the story’s theatrical production: “El juego y el humor han de destacar de forma evidente” (15). And while the most obvious example of humor may be the king’s need of a sex education lesson (24, 25), the Alonso de Santos work is rife with other examples, including the narrator’s expression of surprise that the sex education lesson was successful: “Han pasado nueve meses y el Rey salta de contento / porque la Reina dio a luz: ¡Sí que funcionó el invento!” (27). Humor is also employed in the descriptions of the two horsemen vying with each other to be the one who will awaken the princess; fighting is what knights do, but these complain about the weight of their swords (52), argue over who should deliver the first blow against the other (47), who is more valiant (50), who is more tired (52), who is more crazy (53), who will kiss the princess first (71), and who will leave the stage first after the kingdom has been transformed to mere simulacra (83)—all of which is carried out without the actual, physical coming to blows. That is, the argument is not the usual “I’m first,” egocentric boasting of one’s own abilities but an ironic, “You are first; no, you are” dispute of humorous proportions causing the knights to dismount and take a defensive posture while insisting that the other strike first. Meanwhile, their steeds metaphorically roll their eyes and begin to enjoy themselves: “Y mientras los caballeros se gritan y se pelean, / los caballos se relajan, y en la sobra se pasean” (48) and “Se ponen los dos jacos contentos a cantar / y con sus herraduras se marcan el compás” (54).

Postmodernism also includes a frequent “blurring of distinctions between genres” (Klages)—here, the traditional short story narrated in poetic theater—, the “Process/Performance/Happening” (Hassan 152) nature of the Alonso de Santos’ story⁶ and the parody of the fairy tale’s traditional “happily ever after” ending converted, in the 1994 work, into a collective singing of:

A besar, a besar, vamos todos a besar,
al de al lado y otro lado,
al de arriba y al de abajo,
al de alante y al de atrás.

A besar, a besar, vamos todos a besar,
al gordito, al delgadito
y a aquella de los lacitos
y a la de las pecas, más.

A besar, a besar, vamos todos a besar.
Y muy bien lo has de pasar.
¡¡Y muy bien lo has de pasar!! (Alonso de Santos 85)

As well, the recognized “comieron felices” rendering of “happily ever after” is satirized through the palace party in which “comen muchas perdices” (35)—a seemingly prescient narrative

ending suddenly interrupted by the Evil Fairy's entry and curse—as well as the Caballero Rubio's reading a book in order to learn how to kiss: “Se dice en este libro cómo se ha de besar, / para que la Princesa se pueda despertar. / Dice aquí que hay un beso de frente, / apartando a un lado la nariz, / cuidando de no partirse dientes / y que llaman de perdiz” (43). And a final, and ironic, humorous moment occurs when the king and queen can not agree on any name that the Chamberlain proposes, but quickly agree to “Vega,” the name proposed by the page, because “Rey: ¡Vega es un nombre bonito!” and “Reina: ¡Vega es un nombre cortito!” (33). In short, Alonso de Santos' work amply demonstrates “the increasing sound of a plurality of voices from the margins” (Storey 174)—one of the fundamental characteristics of postmodernism.

Another postmodern tendency in the work is the downplaying of—if not outright distrust of—religion since “Truth” no longer exists. The king is tired of magic, religion, and science and doesn't believe in any of them anymore: “¡Basta y basta de danzas, de zambras y fandangos! / ¡Estoy ya más que harto de tanto bailar tangos! / ¡No quiero oír más rosarios, ni más misas cantadas / [...] / ¡Nada pueden los rezos, ni el baile ni la ciencia!” (21), at which point he calls in a *labriego* to tell him the secret of procreating an heir. Later, when the princess is asleep, “Y nada la despertaba, y nadie lo conseguía. / Mucho rezaron los curas, sus rosarios desgranaron, / y los astrónomos moros las estrellas consultaron. / Y nada la despertaba, y nadie la conseguía” (59). Interestingly, however, the same page who named her is the one who awakens her.

Closed related to postmodernism—in fact Rosenfelt calls these two terms analogous (269)—is postfeminism, and certainly Alonso de Santos' work demonstrates qualities of this as well. Godsland notes the “postfeminist view [of] the violent male [as] an unusual aberration” (95), and certainly that is the case in this story. No where is there a truly violent action by a male, and, in fact, the aforementioned instances of the knights quarrelling, without every coming to blows, is an example of such a postfeminist ethos. The “evil” actions, in fact, all arise from the Hada Mala: her cursing the baby princess and conversion of her boyfriend into a crow (60). She is repentant, however, of both actions, recognizing that “Sé que se me fue la mano / cuando te eché la poción / [...] / ¡Si tú no te hubieras puesto / aquél [sic] día a discutir, / hoy no serías un cuervo / y no estarías así!” (60).

In fact, Tasker and Negra note that “one of the most persistent themes in postfeminist representation is that of ‘retreatism’ or ‘downsizing.’ In the retreatist scenario, a well-educated white female professional displays her ‘empowerment’ and caring nature by withdrawing from the workforce (and symbolically from the public sphere) to devote herself to husband and family” (108). Obviously, in *Besos para la Bella Durmiente* the princess best displays this nature, willing to forfeit the palace life for one with the page, crying to the king, “Deja que a mi lado llegue [el paje], / y que me siga besando / y me siga despertando / y que en mis brazos se quede” (75) and later, to the page, “seré trovadora” (81). However, the queen also demonstrates this postfeminist trait: “me puedo entonces quitar / la corona, y los zapatos / que me aprietan a rabiar” (81) and “Ya que no somos reyes, Doroteo, podemos darnos besos, ya no es feo” (82). This postfeminist view of the “traditional [love and domesticity] as ‘empowered’ and the ‘best’ option” (Tasker and Negra 108) opposes the traditional, patriarchal worldview since the adoption of this ethos depends upon the voluntary choice made by the female and is not imposed upon her by the masculine gender. This postfeminist “exaltation of the individual over the collective” (Godsland 90) even manifests through the fairies when they choose the two horsemen: “Hada

Mala: ¡Espérame, guapo mozo / [...] / dándome tus labios, ven, / rubio caballero hermoso!” and “Hada Buena: “¡Y tú, llega hasta mi lado! / [...] / quiero estar ahora encantada, / bello moreno soñado” (83). That is, all of the females in Alonso de Santos’ work—the queen, the princess, and both fairies—choose this lifestyle of love and domesticity, preferring the consequences of the transformation carried out by the Evil Fairy over that which the king and patriarchal tradition wish to impose.

Obviously, then, the fairy tale, as a literary and artistic genre, can be utilized to reflect the setting from which it emerges as well as society’s and the author’s predispositions and prejudices. Spain in 1994 was no longer totally conforming to the totally patriarchal society of former years; women had made some progress. Yet at the time of publication of *Besos para la Bella Durmiente* feminism was no longer the prevailing voice of change for the women’s movement. Postmodernism, with all its incumbent parody and humor, was exhibiting the most marked influence on contemporary society—as well as Alonso de Santos’ work. Following in postmodernism’s wake was the controversial postfeminism which, while not the strongest voice in Alonso de Santos’ work, is present, demonstrating with ample evidence that mid-1990s Spain is quite diverse in its ethos, has progressed remarkably from the long shadows of the traditional Francoist and patriarchal mentality, and, like the work to which it gives birth, includes traditional, feminist, and postmodern/postfeminist elements.⁷ No longer merely a didactic instrument for socialization or only a subversive element for use by those with an “agenda,” the fairy tale in Spain has now become a mirror of society at large, giving us yet another tool by which one can measure how far Spain has advanced since the death of Franco.

Notes

¹Haase says, “What better way to keep a woman silent than to have her comatose like Sleeping Beauty who slumbers for one hundred years” (33). Soliño, in reference to Matute’s 1995 *El verdadero final de la Bella Durmiente*—a return to Perrault’s *The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods*—comments that “In her passivity, Sleeping Beauty is the incarnation of perfect femininity” (210). An excellent study of the history, reception, rewriting and critical analysis of the story through the ages is Fernández Rodríguez’s *La Bella Durmiente a través de la historia*.

²Soliño quotes *Consigna*, the official Falange educators’ magazine, as advising “Considerar al niño como futuro productor de valores económicos y como sujet de autoridad y fuerza. A la niña consideradla como creadora de valores morales, principalmente, y colaboradora del hombre en el ejercicio de la autoridad y sujeto de resistencia” (49). She continues to detail the “extra-curricular indoctrination” that women suffered at the hands of the Sección Femenina de la Falange.

³While recognizing that postfeminism is a very contested area, clearly “in the mid-eighties, especially since 1985, a new tendency in women’s novels emerged [...]. I call this tendency *postfeminist*” (Rosenfelt 269). Godsland notes that this “shifting pattern [toward postfeminism from the 1980s to the 1990s] is also apparent in women’s crime fiction from Spain” (84-85).

⁴For a more detailed study of how theater, as a performance art, is itself a manner of causing the public to reassess its own notions of art and the relation to culture see Goldberg.

⁵Soliño details the “patriarchal [sic] use of fairy tales as agents of socialization for children, especially in the eighteenth century” (11) while Bottingheimer details the parallel development of the literary fairy tale, male dominance of those stories, and women’s loss of control over their own bodies (19).

⁶Alonso de Santos objects, in his “Diez consejos de autor para representar la obra,” to giving instructions about how *Besos para la Bella Durmiente* should be staged, but he complies with the series editor’s request and states that “Cada compañía—y cada actor y director—empleará su preparación y talento y de ellos dependerá el resultado final” (15). He further states—consejo number 7—that “No me importa que se corte texto de mis obras, en caso de que se considere necesario. Lo que nunca justificaría es que se añada” (16). This “preface” to the work then makes clear to the reader that the author perceives, and desires, that the story is process and performance based.

⁷Interestingly, as Soliño notes, even Matute—a writer whose former works have been interpreted as in opposition to the patriarchal impositions—has a shift in her thinking in the 1990s: “Now [Matute] claims that a story such as [her *El verdadero final de la Bella Durmiente*] should be used to educate children. Thus, she prepares a tale in which she restores the conservative aspects of fairy tales as she dwells obsessively over the morbid details of the stories that were used to teach girls the rules of society” (208). Later, Soliño adds that “Matute presents [in *El verdadero final*] a condemnation of active, powerful women that is much stronger than even Perrault’s” (210).

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