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Abstract

Examines the narrative structure of *Beauty* and *The Blue Sword* in terms of Genette's distinction between mimetic authority and diegetic authority. Notes that both protagonists have little control over events and once their function is served, the patriarchal character of their world persists.

Additional Keywords

Feminist criticism; McKinley, Robin—Characters—Women; McKinley, Robin. *Beauty*—Narrative Structure; McKinley, Robin. *The Blue Sword*—Narrative structure

The Illusion of Control

NARRATIVE AUTHORITY IN ROBIN MCKINLEY'S *Beauty and The Blue Sword*

Michael Cadden

In a recent volume of *Children's Literature*, Len Hatfield reveals how narrative authority is negotiated between the mimetic and diegetic levels of narrative in Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* books. Hatfield paraphrases Gerard Genette's distinction between "mimesis" and "diegesis":

Mimetic authority is represented in the fictional world, while diegetic authority refers to the world encompassing the fictive one, . . . moving . . . to such matters as the text's style and organization, its relations with other texts, and finally its place in the "real" world. Mimetic authority is fictive; diegetic connects to us "out here." (62)

Professor Hatfield reveals how the narrative pattern and authority of the last book of *Earthsea*, *Tehanu*, is a marked departure from the hierarchical, or patriarchal, nature of the first three books (61). Le Guin empowers feminine morality in *Earthsea* through levels of narrative to redefine the mimetic world of that text. But Robin McKinley, another writer of fantasy for children, traps two of her female heroes in patriarchal mimetic worlds because they can't take control (or won't be granted control by the author) of the diegetic level. Understanding that there are narrative levels of authority at work in both texts helps us to see where potentially restrictive narrative power rests, and "helps account for the reader's response to the shifting codes of authority in each book" — or the illusion of shifting codes (Hatfield 62).

In McKinley's two texts, the diegetic authority is revealed to us in each heroine's movement between the various fictive worlds (from, say, *Beauty's* first home to her second by the forest — or from that home to the Beast's castle). Diegesis refers to both the movement each protagonist makes between mimetic (or fictive) worlds in the text and the totality of the movement, or narrative direction, of the novel. Mimesis refers to the smaller worlds represented within the larger world of the story; they are the locations rather than the movement.

Parallel Structures

Gerard Genette warns anyone engaging in the study of narrative structure that he or she runs the risk of inventing systems while believing he or she is discovering them (11). The structures of the two books can be divided (whether invented or discovered) into five parts, or worlds: *The Old World*, *The Self-Contained World #1* (or "*The Real World*"), *The Self-Contained World #2* (or "*The Dream World*"), *The World Bridge*, and *The New* (or the "*Synthesized*") *World*.

The Old World in both tales is that place from which the protagonist originally comes. The Old World is the background necessary for establishing a past, but one which is too open-ended to be the location for the heroic development of the protagonist. The protagonist's move to the Real World in each tale enables her to operate and be defined in an environment easily "located" — one with discernible narrative barriers. This second world is also "real" in the sense that it is closer to the world in which the protagonists are raised. So, The Real World is both a continuation of the established reality from The Old World and is also narratively Self-Contained.

Chapter one of *Beauty* provides her Old World in which *Beauty's* family and its history are established, and the reader learns that they will have a different life ahead; they "knew that [they] were bound for a little four-room house in a town called Blue Hill" (17); their lives would be soon very different from their current lives of affluence in The Old World. On the other hand, *Harry's* Old World in *The Blue Sword* is established with brief and largely expository flashback. Harry reminisces about her Old World as she is in transit to her new home and is off to a very different existence in her now Real World; we know that what the protagonist heads toward in each story is new and necessarily requires change. We, as readers soon interested in the protagonists' fates, make the break with them and are ready to start over with them.

The first Self-Contained World in each story is one step removed from the reality of the first, the Old World, but not fantastic in nature. This world supplies the protagonist a Real World on the boundaries of the second Self-Contained World — The Dream World. For example, *Beauty* must promise Ger that she will stay out of the "enchanted woods" (41), and *Harry* learns of the "queer stories about the old rulers of Damar" (14) as a warning that one doesn't leave the safety of the base. David Woolsey claims that McKinley "firmly [grounds] the story in reality before moving to fantasy," and we can recognize that in each story the base of "reality" is set. However, the fantasy doesn't "trickle in," as he claims, but is clearly demarcated by borders in each story (130).¹

Within these islands of reality we are given the opportunity to see the protagonists develop. This Self-Contained World of Reality is an anchor for the protagonists — a place from which they can dream safely or, as they grow stronger and more secure, to project fantasies about what lies on "the other side"

(or, perhaps more truthfully, on the side of the Other).

The second Self-Contained World is that of the fantastic — the Dream World Adventure. This world is the most developed and dwelled-upon in both stories. It is here the protagonists must contend with the powers of the masculine “kings” and carve out roles for themselves. The Dream World contrasts to the Real World in that it hasn’t the advantage of being first in construction; therefore it takes on an “other worldly” quality. The Dream World shares with the Real World, however, the quality of self-containment. The reader invests most of his or her interest in the self-contained worlds because they are the site of most character dynamics—growth and action.

The transforming World Bridge is the next stage. Here each protagonist blends both Self-Contained worlds in her actions, thereby synthesizing them within herself; in this sense she seems to stand apart from and above the mimetic worlds (the fictive locations) and takes on diegetic (or super-structural) control. She does heal the split between the Real and the Dream to create the New World, though, as we shall see, at some expense to herself.

Beauty-as-World-Bridge is the movement she makes as she returns to her family’s cottage and brings them to The Dream World to create The New World; Harry-as-World-Bridge is her movement as she breaks from Corlath, returns to the fort, and draws Jack and the others into the struggle of The Dream World en route to creating The New World.² In both cases, the protagonists seem to be preparing a new, synthesized world on which should be left the feminine mark and allow for feminine power.

The last stage is the New World. This is the World resulting from the diegetic synthesis of both mimetic Self-Contained Worlds. As the Old World is open-ended in terms of the past, the New World is open-ended “to the right,” so to speak, or to the future, and shares an expository quality with the Old World. The future is provided by implication; we are no longer in a self-contained environment so we must be given a sense of direction. To give us a true sense of “happily ever after” as a direction, McKinley creates a predictable mechanism (the life of a Queen after the Royal Wedding) that doesn’t allow for the variation possible within a self-contained world — a world with closure and definition. The world is only open-ended in time, not in the promise of myriad possibilities; the two protagonists have a closed-ended future. We as readers, and Harry and Beauty as protagonists, make our way out of the mimetic world of the text, its own physics, and see that the “direction” of the story-after-the-story is masculine both in the physics (the place itself) and metaphysics (the diegetic authority of plot movement and masculine hero-quest which ultimately informs the stories). The New World is the unempowering home of the female protagonist in each novel. However, the very different methods of the protagonists employed in attempting to control their lives in their mimetic environments seem to have little to do with why both fail to keep real power at the end of their tales.

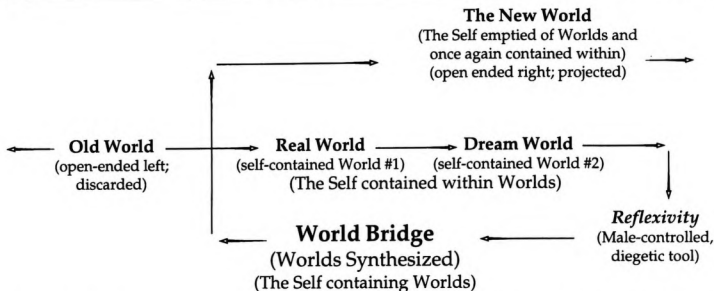
Control and Power Within The Worlds

Beauty and Harry have different loci of control, though they both have the *illusion* of power. Beauty is, as Carol Christ would suggest, on something of a “spiritual quest” (Pratt 135).³ Beauty embodies an inner locus of control while Harry’s is close to the “social quest,” and her locus of control is defined by external action. Both protagonists differ in how they attempt to “achieve Selfhood through individual choice” (Pratt 6).

The “social quest” entails “the Self’s journey in relation to cosmic power or powers. It often is interior but may also have communal dimensions” (Pratt 135). Beauty tells us as she is in her Dream World that she “liked and needed solitude for study and reflection; but [she] also wanted someone to talk to” (139) and turns to the Beast. Her inner locus of control, however, seems to keep Beauty in a position of self-possession within most worlds. Her solitude seems to have given her a will. She does not appear to be defined by the wishes of others, and she engages in atypical behavior in her Old World, Real World (Self-Contained #1) and with the Beast in the Dream World (Self-Contained #2). She is not really imprisoned—if we can believe the Beast. Beauty doesn’t respond to her trap, using the methods of the trickster (Paul 198); she doesn’t deceive or subvert. She neither goes “mad or silent” (Gilbert and Gubar, quoted in Paul 188) in her rooms. She is in control of her integrity and her single status, for “every night . . . the Beast said: ‘Will you marry me, Beauty?’ And every night [she] said ‘No’” (138). She seems to be the one calling the shots regarding protocol and the Beast’s status (185). In fact, she is told outright that she is the castle’s mistress (131). She appears to be her own mistress, which seems to give her control as she is situated in the mimetic Dream World.

Harry’s external social quest involves a “search for the self in which the protagonist begins in alienation and seeks integration into a human community where she can develop more fully” (Pratt 135). Harry’s “gifts” or powers are things out of her control and are socially-defined. *Kelar*, the genetically passed-on gift of sight and magic, controls her. Her first experience with *kelar* is an eye-lock with Corlath (37) and reveals that her power is not so much hers, a possession; rather, she is its possession — at the most an alembic. Harry is constantly being defined by others, unlike Beauty — as when Harry is made a King’s Rider (137) or is defined as Dick’s sister (10). Harry’s solitude is not like Beauty’s in that Harry doesn’t revel in it or even cause it. But Harry makes things happen, and it seems that her actions affect and control the lives of those around her.

Confined to a look at the first three worlds, we must conclude that Beauty’s control is a spiritual, inner, feminine possession in a masculine environment; Harry’s type of control is social, external, masculine activity in a masculine environment, although she is a woman. In worlds one through three, the protagonists are consistent as figures trying to control their circumstances either internally or exter-



nally, femininely or masculinely. The two female protagonists take two different paths to the same fate in identical worlds. Their methods matter not at all because they ultimately don't dictate anything; they are empty signifiers, ciphers. The seams between the patriarchal mimetic worlds, or the movements/gaps between, reveal the true power that organizes the larger text — a power diegetically superior, it will turn out, to that of The World Bridge.

Control In Movement Between Worlds

When we look at the ways both Beauty and Harry make the transitions between worlds, we realize to what extent they are not in control until world four (World Bridge), when it appears they have really taken over. Concentration on transitions *between* worlds (diegetic issues of organization) reinforces the patriarchal nature of the mimetic worlds with patriarchal diegetic authority.

Given their new-found control, the protagonists might be able to carve out power, or change the structure of the mimetic worlds—but the larger, diegetic forces won't allow it. In this sense the two heroes are twice removed from their creator (McKinley), separated by the masculine fictive world in the text and the patriarchal diegesis that informs and ultimately supports it.

The World Bridge is where the two protagonists seem to have true control, if only for a while — where the feminine cycle is present in the predominantly patriarchal diegetic construction. It is the reflexive nature of the World Bridge that allows feminine control in what is temporarily a woman's environment. It would appear that each woman takes real control over plot movement for the first (and last) time as World Bridge — where the woman embodies, carries, bears the world itself. The location of this world is in time and action; this temporal location appears to momentarily challenge the masculine diegesis. Annis Pratt tells us that "since women are alienated from time and space, their plots take on cyclical, rather than

linear form, and their houses and landscapes surreal properties" (11). Certainly the cyclical part of this model, the World Bridge, the world that works to unite worlds, creates in the reflexive synthesis what ought to be a re-defined world in which the creator is empowered.

In *Beauty*, our protagonist is caused to move to each world because of the actions (failures, actually) of a man. While Beauty adapts well, since she is a strong character, she is in the position of having to. In the Old World, she was a learned woman in a man's world which didn't really allow for such a thing; her father's position enabled her to live as she did. When Beauty's father's business fails, Beauty and her family are moved to the first island world under the protection and direction of the men. While Beauty makes the most of the situation and "hardens" (28) physically, she is pulled from her studies.

Another failure of her father's is what propels Beauty over the barrier of the second world, transporting her to the Dream World. While Beauty chooses to go, her choice is destined by her stubborn and strong character. She doesn't seize an opportunity but, again, she makes the best of a failed situation. Her act is honourable, but it is dictated by the action of her father.

Beauty's movement *back* home — a move that will bring the two worlds together, is a self-directed attempt to save her sister from making a mistake. She acts because of the already-failed actions of her father. The return home reveals to Beauty that she does indeed love the Beast, which enables a wedding to take place and the worlds to be united. Beauty appears to hold the Beast's life in her hands and her family's love in the other, in complete control. She, as World Bridge, has begun to unite the worlds through what will be the traditionally feminine virtue of Love.

Harry / Angarahad / Harimad-Sol is in even less control of her transitions than she is of her name. First, Harry is

carted off to the Real World of the Outland post by her brother due to the failure of her father to provide for her. Next she is literally carried off by Corlath to the Dream World of Damar.

Like Beauty, Harry seems to take true control finally at one point—despite what otherwise seems like destiny, as Luthe tells her, “not of her own choosing” (163). Harry claims that she has “no choice” (184) in returning to the Outpost, but this is her first action based on options. She returns to the fort to unite her two worlds. She considers the relations between Jack and her two friends, Terim and Senay, and thinks to herself “the bridge could stretch to cross this chasm” (189). Knowing that she is the World Bridge, Harry recognizes that “perhaps it did not matter in what world she belonged if both worlds were marching in step” (189). Luthe tells her plainly that in her “two worlds meet” (164).

But if we look closely, these tokens of control are driven, organized, by men. The Beast allows Beauty to go and also allows her to stay as his wife. It is the very moment of synthesis, the very act of accepting the Beast’s proposal which will complete the melding of the worlds, that she is *moved* into the New World. The fact that she has no control to stay except as Wife should signal to us that it was a male-run diegetic all along. The World Bridge isn’t a place, but an action; she cannot dwell there, and neither has she been able to make of the two self-contained worlds one amicable for truly powerful women. She has to be re-admitted by the male through the marriage act. Unlike the open-ended, patriarchal New World, the World Bridge (the woman’s world) has to end as soon as it begins because it is used as a tool.

Like Beauty, Harimad-Sol as World Bridge isn’t in diegetical control either, or destined to live long in that Time outside the masculine authority, if she is ever outside it. Harry, as World Bridge, is a world in motion that must come to rest in a male world. Once she begins what she considers “treason,” there is no way to stop the motion. Her victory at the pass would seem to be the act that unites the worlds, the reason for the end of the talk of Outlanders versus “we who love the hills” (289), but McKinley deems that Harry’s wedding to Corlath is necessary for her to remain in the New World. It becomes clear that Corlath allows Harimad-Sol to leave to fulfill a destiny that, as a tool of the King, will create a stronger, more secure patriarchal world.

Control in the New World

Where are Beauty and Harry left at their tales’ ends? What does “open-ended right” mean to these protagonists? As World Bridges, these women serve as Healers. Their characters become one with their function and they risk a loss of Self when that function is served.⁴

Harry’s *kelar* was once a gift of healing in the old days (34), and we see that she heals the wounded from the battle—healing attended to before her wedding when she is still

binding bodies and worlds (240); her power was always meant to be one of service, not control. Beauty has healed her family of poverty and her Beast of lovelessness. Her success at binding wounds and worlds is observed in the last scene where she is surrounded by not only her family but by what seems a once-lost nation. She is finished as a tool. Once the two have resolved contraries by uniting them in their own persons (Pratt 111) their control is gone and they are defined by a patriarchal distinction: Queen. In marriage they have *officially* conceded a control they never really had and become objects, figure heads.⁵ One might argue that in naming her new Prince, Beauty has control (246); but there is nothing that she can name him that will come before his title. He is already named “King” and she “Queen.”

Beauty and Harry are Queens in their male worlds, ciphers in the masculine mimetic worlds thanks to the diegetic authority behind those world constructions. If Quest, as Altmann claims, is “the process of stripping off the armour of the identity we have constructed for ourselves” (150), it seems that while Harry “strips off the armour,” she and Beauty both get re-dressed as roles rather than as people. Their quests benefit the patriarchal world, but not themselves as female heroes. They have been on false quests. There is no reconception of the diegetical authority informing the mimetic world. The New World may be the fruit of their labor, but those worlds are claimed as the King’s children. The women were only vessels. Neither woman is the “prodigal daughter” Flieger describes: “enriched. . . . To be prodigal in this sense is to alter the law, to enlarge its parameters and recast its meaning” (60). The patriarchal law isn’t altered or recast, although the protagonists are. We leave the protagonists in the last, open-ended world, sure we won’t have to stay with them to know what will happen for “ever after.”

According to Pratt, writing is “an act of defiance when it gives women archetypes” (11). But Beauty and Harry are dwelling in the masculine paradigm and will ultimately be defined by it, despite any token or ceremonial control they have within worlds and any temporal “power” in uniting them. While McKinley’s texts are superb quest narratives, the quests are those of Kings to create a bigger, more secure kingdom. The Kings use the World Bridges to walk over themselves. Ultimately, McKinley’s isn’t Cixous’ “self-speaking text,” for McKinley’s text knows a god, not goddess.

Notes

- David Woolsey seems to recognize little real about the fantasy into which Beauty moves. He makes an issue of the metaphoric value of the story as “fairy tale” but fails to recognize that the fleshing out of Beaumont’s tale creates fantasy rather than just metaphoric fairy tale. The story must make the fantastic real, viable, in order for us to accept it. We cannot dismiss the “fantasy” in either *Beauty* or *The Blue Sword* as mere metaphor.

(Continued on Page 31)

Notes

1. "Jungians on a Space Trip," *Los Angeles Times*, Marylouise Oates, 10-14-80 V:1:1; "The Appeal of Star Wars: An Archetypal-Psychanalytical View," *American Imago*, Martin Miller and Robert Sprich, pp. 205-19. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973.) and *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, ed. Betty Sue Flowers, (New York: Doubleday, 1988.)
2. Though Lucas has spoken on this topic multiple times, he articulated it most clearly at the 1985 National Arts Club presentation to Joseph Campbell of the Medal of Honor for Literature. Quoted in *The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on His Life and Work*, ed. Phil Cousineau, (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 180.
3. "Symbolism of the Marseilles Deck," *Tarot Revelations*, R. Roberts and Joseph Campbell (San Anselmo, CA, 1979.) pp. 8-25.
4. *The Tarot: The Origins, Meaning and Uses of the Cards*, Alfred Douglas (New York: Penguin Books, 1980.) pp. 34-6.
5. *The Book of Thoth* (Egyptian Tarot), Aleister Crowley (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1980.) p.3.
6. *The Windows of Tarot*, Frederick David Graves (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Morgan & Morgan Inc., 1973.) pp. 15-7.
7. *Skysailing: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, Dale Pollock, (New York: Harmony Books, 1983.) p.146.
8. Title page from *The Art of "Star Wars"*, ed. Carol Titelman, (New York: Balantine, 1979) reads "Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope from the Journal of the Whills by George Lucas, revised fourth Draft, January 15, 1976.
9. *Psychology and Alchemy*, Carl Gustav Jung, (London and New York, 1953.) p.123.

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Beauty, continued from page 19

2. Both stories' true transition from The World Bridge to The New World is the Royal wedding, however; McKinley's metaphysical makes the weddings necessary. The importance of this fact is treated in my later section, "Control in the New World." The Old World is lost in the original move from that world to the Real World. The World Bridge only synthesizes the two Self-Contained Worlds because only they both still exist (simultaneously and as if in different dimensions) and contain all principle characters. The Old World has past; it is separated from the others by time as well as place.
3. I say "somewhat" because we won't be able to claim a true feminine quest within either story, which will become evident.
4. Harry's abduction opens up the whole issue of the role of the Dream as an illustration of the women's lack of control and stability, not to mention general discomfort and confusion, in these male-run transitions. A discussion of the role of the dreams in this study proves too extensive a digression, however. I would like to point out that dreams, memory flash-backs, and personal confusion occur in the following places in the texts: *Beauty*: pp. 82, 91, 191, 171, 177, 114. *Blue Sword*: 50, 56, 108, 123, 82, 83, 70, 200.

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The *MLA Handbook* is the preferred style for articles, except that short citations like *ibid.*, *op.cit.*, & author and page number references alone, are best incorporated within parentheses in the text, rather than making them footnotes.

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Glen H. GoodKnight, 742 South Garfield Ave., Monterey Park, CA 91754 USA

5 Much like Mary's condition in Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

6 We are told on the penultimate page that "Corlath eyed his wife" (247). She has become reduced to her new role, unnamed, put under his eye/control.

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