

# Subverting Normal: The Anti-Fairy Tale in Linda Holeman's "Toxic Love" and Wendy A. Lewis's "You Never Know"

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**Résumé :** «Ils se marièrent, eurent beaucoup d'enfants et vécurent heureux jusqu'à la fin de leurs jours», ainsi doit se terminer tout bon conte de fées qui se respecte. Cette formule de clôture, qui confine au mythe, exclut toutes les autres formes de bonheur et de relations amoureuses. Tout à l'opposé, Linda Holeman et Wendy A. Lewis, dans leur volonté de subvertir les contes de fées, élaborent un dialogue littéraire entre les thèmes hérités de la tradition littéraire et ceux que suggère la réalité vécue des adolescents d'aujourd'hui. Ces écrivains remettent ainsi en cause les valeurs les mieux établies et proposent, dans leurs anticontes, des fins ne répondant guère aux attentes des lecteurs, et ce, afin de mieux faire valoir d'autres destins et d'autres modes de vie.

**Summary:** The quintessential fairy tale ending of the prince and the princess living "happily ever after" is a powerfully naturalized myth that effectively excludes other versions of happiness and success. Linda Holeman and Wendy A. Lewis use modern fairy tale motifs as counterpoints to "reality" to subvert the normalized/naturalized ideals of the fairy tale by placing them in literary dialogue with stories of "real" young adults. The strategy of the anti-fairy tale allows these authors to challenge the unrealistic homogeneity of modern fairy tale romance, supplanting the generic heterosexual fantasy with anti- or non-fairy tale conclusions. These anti-fairy tale conclusions offer alternatives to the "prince and princess" happy ending, allowing readers to imagine different forms of love as normal and natural.

As folk and fairy tale, the tale of magic produces wonder precisely through its seductively concealed exploitation of the conflict between its *normative* function, which capitalizes on the comforts of consensus, and its *subversive* wonder, which magnifies the powers of transformation.

— Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (7)

We currently use the catch-all abstraction of “the fairy tale” to refer to an ideal world.<sup>1</sup> A “fairy tale” world is an unambiguous world where good and evil are clearly and irrevocably demarcated,<sup>2</sup> with good rewarded and evil punished. More than anything else, the current and arguably most popular understanding of “the fairy tale” provides us with a world where the prince finds the princess and they live happily ever after in wedded and (presumably) procreative bliss.<sup>3</sup> North American society<sup>4</sup> is structured around the heterosexual fairy tale ideal:<sup>5</sup> that the prince and princess will love each other and their children and that, as products of a fairy tale ideal, these children will have happy and normal lives. One consequence of the heterosexual fairy tale ideal is that relationships and families which fail to measure up to or comply with the necessary rituals of marriage, children, and happily-ever-after are either covertly or overtly punished by “normal” society depending upon how outrageous their aberration from the ideal. Individuals who fail to comply with normal codes of gender behaviour become part of an abject nation<sup>6</sup> of “queers” and “bastards.” Families that fail to comply with the prince and princess version of “happily-ever-after” are marked as “single-parent families” or become part of the equally sordid category “broken homes.” Regardless of reality (high divorce rates, for example), the popular understanding of “the fairy tale” in North American society represents a normalized ideal from which we apparently cannot escape.

The heterosexual ideal works and is maintained and/or is perpetuated by the fairy tale genre so effectively because, as Cristina Bacchilega notes, “What distinguishes the tale of magic or fairy tale as a genre . . . is its effort to conceal its ‘work’ systematically — to naturalize its artifice, to make everything so clear that it works magic, no questions asked” (8). The apparent universality of the heterosexual “happily-ever-after” (that “happily-ever-after” which pre-/excludes all others) is experienced without a blip on the proverbial critical screen of, say, the audience of a Disney movie, because that particular “happily-ever-after” is a heavily mythologized entity. Let me refer briefly to Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* to explain why the heterosexism of the fairy tale ending goes unquestioned: “In the second (mythical) system, causality is artificial, false; but it creeps, so to speak, through the back door of Nature. This is why myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden — if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious — but because they are naturalized” (131).

The “prince and the princess” myth, then, operates as a or perhaps *the* standing myth in our (let’s say Canadian) culture. Their story, told uncountable times, becomes the story of every girl and every boy; it operates as a mythological template, one rife with gender stereotypes and expectations of appropriate sexuality.

While the modern fairy tale is pervasive, we can find refuge from it through the anti-fairy tale, a form of tactical parody<sup>7</sup> that finds power in the excess that marks the fairy tale ideal. In this paper, I will examine how two Canadian authors of books for young adults manage to upset the heterosexual fairy tale ideal by strategically positioning that version of normalized perfection against the lives of “real” teens; in doing so, they create two different versions of the anti-fairy tale. In the short story “Toxic Love,” Linda Holeman challenges the heterosexism of the romance novel — the “boy-meets-girl” genre *par excellence* — by placing her well-meaning heroine in the middle of a lesbian love affair. Wendy A. Lewis takes on the constitutive modern-day fairy tale in her short story “You Never Know” by thematically interweaving the fantastic discourse surrounding the wedding and life of Diana, Princess of Wales with the stories of small-town Canadian teens. By writing the anti-fairy tale, these authors employ what Ruth Bottigheimer argues are the “three principal functions” of the fairy tale in modern society: “the fairy tale as an illusion, as an allusion, and as a paradigm” (xi). Holeman and Lewis reflect, reject, and (more to the point perhaps) *deflect* the modern fairy tale’s reliance on the normalization of heterosexual coupling, offering alternate understandings of happiness and fulfillment by exposing as fabricated the universal myth of the prince and the princess. Most important, perhaps, is the way that these anti-fairy tales utilize the trope of the “outsider” to reveal how the powerful discourse of abjection stalls the process of happiness for these teen protagonists and how the acceptance of difference allows them to find the paths to their own “happily-ever-afters.”

In his introduction to *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, Jack Zipes notes that, “From the beginning, fairy tales were symbolic commentaries on the mores and customs of a particular society and the classes and groups within these societies and how their actions and relations could lead to success and happiness” (xxi). Clearly, heterosexual love is *the* locus of success and happiness in the modern fairy tale. What happens, then, when a Canadian teen living in an isolated prairie farming community encounters for the first time a new version of happiness — one that is not heterosexual? What happens to fairy-tale notions of “happily ever after” when they must stand up to a queer alternative?

Holeman’s “Toxic Love,” the first in a collection of stories entitled *Saying Goodbye* (1995), is the study of a young girl who is desperate for her own happy ending. Carla, an avid romance reader, decides to intervene in a tragic love triangle that she perceives within the walls of her high school.

She believes that Miss Madeleine Kleinfeld is in love with Mr. Mark Gauthier, another teacher, who appears to be in love with the school secretary, Miss Lola Pickell. Carla watches as Miss Kleinfeld seems to waste away with desire for Mr. Gauthier while he woos Miss Pickell. Ultimately, once Miss Pickell has moved away, Carla discovers that Miss Kleinfeld and Miss Pickell are lovers and that it is *Mr. Gauthier* who is the slighted suitor. "Toxic Love" up-ends the "traditionalism of romance fiction" (Radway 580) with its queer conclusion. Ultimately, this topsy-turvy "real-life" love story allows Carla to re-evaluate her own criteria of happy endings and warns against the assumption that all romance must be straight.

Carla introduces the story by telling us about the status of her love life: "Despite being of sound mind and body and in the middle of my teen years I have not known a great love — or even one of mediocre quality. Because of this lack, I have submerged myself in the love of others" (1). Carla stutters. She is a "short girl with temperamental skin and hair the colour of an aging mouse" (4) for whom "books grew to be more than mere companions . . . . They were [her] world of love" (4). While Carla hopes that she will, when she moves to the city to attend university, "meet him — the nameless man [she] knew was out there waiting for [her]" (2), she lives in the world of romance fiction until that time. Carla's longing for her own happy ending is consistent with the expectations of romance readers all over (North) America.<sup>8</sup> Janice Radway explains that "without the happy ending the romance could not hold out the utopian promise that male-female relations can be successfully managed" (596). At the end of a *good* romance,<sup>9</sup> Radway finds, "all works out for the heroine as it should" (594). The happy ending in a *good* romance, as in the modern fairy tale, "restores the status quo in gender relations when the hero enfolds the heroine protectively in his arms" (602). The status quo, of course, as represented in the modern fairy tale, presupposes the (hetero)sexuality of all its heroes and heroines. Every happy ending is necessarily heterosexual.

While she revels in a fantasy of her own happy ending, Carla has coined the phrase "Toxic Love" to classify all romances that end unhappily, wherein the heroine cannot have the hero she deserves for any number of formulaic reasons: "Commonly, the man is already married, or just in the process of falling in love with someone else. Perhaps, on the day the couple are to consummate their love, they are separated by a war [or] . . . just after professing his love, a wonderful man might develop a grievous disease . . . [o]r he could be involved in a debilitating accident" (5). Carla wallows in fictional cases of Toxic Love while simultaneously feeling that "[i]f [she] could have slipped between the pages of those novels, [she] could have averted much of the tragedy" (6). When a "virulent case of Toxic Love" (6) seems to strike her "English lit. [sic] teacher, Madeleine Kleinfeld" (6), Carla decides to intervene in order to orchestrate a happy ending.

Carla is not a full-blown meddler. She is more of an observer, and she

witnesses the courtship between Mr. Gauthier and Miss Pickell, which seems to be one-sided: "But each time I saw them together, around the school or in town, I couldn't see much evidence of true love, at least not on Miss Pickell's part. She seemed to treat Mr. Gauthier with a certain disdain" (12). Carla does notice, however, in the capacity of her job as the lunch-hour school office volunteer, that whenever she "opened Miss Pickell's top drawer to take out a pen, there was always a little box of Laura Secord fruit jellies or a tiny heart-shaped box of ginger chocolates. 'To L. Love, M.' was written on the left-hand top corner of every box" (12). Of course Carla assumes that the candy is from Mark Gauthier, but at the end of the story, when she notices Madeleine Kleinfeld's initials in a book, she makes an unexpected discovery: "But tonight that M stood out, seemed to bore into my brain. I had seen it somewhere else, somewhere I hadn't expected to see it. To L. Love, M." (21). When we learn that Miss Kleinfeld is queer, her earlier caveat to Carla, when Carla insists that she "'like[s] endings where everyone is happy'" (19), makes a great deal of sense. Miss Kleinfeld says, "Don't spend these precious years of your life worrying about the complicated whys of love. . . . And remember, you don't always find happiness, or love, where you expect to" (19). Carla wants the woman to love the man; she thinks "it's great when it all works out in the end" (18). But Miss Kleinfeld explains that, in the world of fiction (and in life), "Things just don't always work out the way we think they will. That's why conclusions that are too pat are called story-book endings" (19). Here, Holeman draws our attention to the consequences of using the paradigm of universal heterosexuality to gauge our actions in life. While happiness may be the broad ideal of the modern fairy tale, happiness in the storybook is only ever sought in the form of straight love. Miss Kleinfeld's advice, coupled with Carla's discovery, offers the readers an important lesson in decoding romantic fiction (see Hall) and teaches us to be wary of our own assumptions.

One of the great strengths of "Toxic Love" is the way in which Holeman deals with sexuality and gender codes. On the first page of the story, for example, Carla acknowledges that the intimate knowledge that families in her small farming community have of one another "dampened some of the enthusiasm for the typical boy-meets-girl scenerios" (1). By using the words "the typical" before "boy-meets-girl," Holeman gestures toward the assumed universality of that heterosexual attraction on which the romantic aspirations of young people are formed. To step outside of "the typical" is an aberration of a potent norm, and Carla, "A year away from [her] final year of high school, . . . was still hoping for [her] first real date" (1). As we saw earlier, the fact that she has never had any kind of love is perceived by Carla as a "lack" (1) and her fantasy of that amorphous, generic, "nameless" (2) man in the city might be understood to represent her desire to conform to heterosexual standards. Carla assumes that "he" is "out there" (2) based on a fantasy informed by romance fiction. It is necessary for her

to believe in this "nameless man," for without him, her sexual identity<sup>10</sup> must be called into question. After all, what is a heroine without a hero?

While Carla seems to want to conform to the straight world in which she lives, she generally describes herself as an observer rather than a participant in the gender-appropriate norms of her day. Carla describes the scene in Miss Kleinfeld's classroom as if she existed outside of this world: "The boys openly disregarded her, absently picking at calluses on their palms or cracking their knuckles or yawning huge, noisy yawns that often ended in a burp, calling forth an onslaught of answering burps. The girls feigned disgust at the male body noises, wrote and passed notes, or put on make-up" (7). Carla's fear of not conforming to this world is painfully rendered: "I longed to call out the answers Miss Kleinfeld wanted to hear, but I had learned many years ago, by grade three or four, that no one likes someone who knows all the answers" (7). Carla's desire for a happy ending in her own life echoes what Radway found in her study: "The romantic fantasy is . . . not a fantasy about discovering a uniquely interesting life partner, but a ritual wish to be cared for, loved, and validated in a particular way" (604). Miss Kleinfeld represents the fulfillment of this wish for Carla:

Alone with her, and somehow sensing she was an ally, I relaxed, and before long was able to speak to her with a minimum of the laborious effort that was needed when I was anxious or tired. She always listened carefully, respectfully, as if she were really interested in what I had to say. She didn't finish my words or sentences. . . . We actually started having heated conversations about books we had read, and she lent me some of her own that weren't in the school library. After a few months I think I had started to love Miss Kleinfeld just a little. (8-9)

While Holeman's narrative first makes us believe that Carla's interest in Miss Kleinfeld's love life is due to her wish to protect her, the ambiguous ending of the story may (especially for a queer reader, I think) lead us to believe that Carla is beginning to realize that she might be queer: "I tasted salt on my lips and brushed at my cheeks, but the tears wouldn't stop. They kept squeezing out, slowly, steadily, as I waited for sleep, thinking about happy endings" (22). The ambivalence of Holeman's ending provides an interesting twist on the fairy tale genre. As we know, the marriage at the end of a fairy tale/romance always represents an unequivocal happy ending. The ending of "Toxic Love" is not so simplistic, and the tears Carla sheds as she contemplates happy endings might be understood as an appropriately indeterminate response to such ambivalence. Carla may be experiencing sadness or regret that her romantic illusions have been shattered; her world is unsettled now that a queer reality has been imposed on what was previously an unchallenged notion of universal heterosexuality. But her tears might also suggest a sense of relief that a happy ending is

possible outside of the heterosexual world into which she, so far, does not fit. As an anti-fairy tale, "Toxic Love" does not leave us with a clear answer about who is happy at the end, but by exploring notions of ideal love it allows readers to imagine queer romantic relations as a possible happy ending.

Lewis's "You Never Know," a story in the collection *Graveyard Girl* (2000), deals in a more direct way with issues of sexuality, and her ending, much like the conclusion of "Toxic Love," is bittersweet. The central metaphor of *Graveyard Girl* is the Royal Wedding of Charles and Diana in 1981 and the dramatic reproduction of that wedding attempted by the high school students in small-town Ontario the next year. The book jacket of *Graveyard Girl* promises that the book "reveals the lives, hidden loves and fears of teenagers bound by fairy-tale dreams." Marguerite Helmers notes that the "highly publicized wedding" (437) of Diana Spencer and the Prince of Wales "was called a 'fairy tale.' Lady Diana arrived at St. Paul's Cathedral in London in a golden coach. Her dress was a Victorian fantasy, yards of ivory silk billowing over crinolines. Charles wore ceremonial military regalia" (437). It is this fairy tale that resonates through the pages of *Graveyard Girl*. In "You Never Know," a queer teen must negotiate her sexuality against the backdrop of this profoundly idealized version of heterosexual love.

When Tish realizes that she is in love with her best friend, she has to figure out how to survive in a world governed by the discourse of naturalized heterosexuality. Lewis negotiates Tish's path by using "fairy tale elements as a contrapuntal ground for plot and character development" (Bottigheimer xii). For example, Tish's best friend Alex lives in a house that "was made to look a hundred years old, with Victorian gingerbread dripping off the eaves and a round turret on one corner. Alex slept in the turret bedroom like a princess in a fairy-tale castle" (57). Not only is Alex figured as the princess, but she also, at a young age, enacts the fairy tale prince and princess fantasy. Tish explains that Alex "got her first Barbie when she was three and insisted on getting a Ken so they could have weddings" (57). Tish, on the other hand, "never liked the way [Barbies] had to totter around on high heels because their feet were shaped that way" and preferred to feed her Barbie to her toy crocodile (57). Even though Tish and Alex have outgrown Barbie, Tish still fails to be interested in typical straight-girl obsessions. Alex doesn't understand why Tish doesn't love the movie stars with "square jaws and smoldering eyes and locks of hair drooping down their foreheads" (57). Tish is alienated because she does not plaster posters of male movie stars on her wall. She dreams about her princess instead of her prince, but she knows better than to tell anyone her fantasies.

The great anti-fairy tale moment of the story occurs when Alex graduates to crushes on "real guys" (58) and she suggests that she and Tish practice kissing so that they will "both be ready" (58) for the time when they will kiss a boy. Tish explains the ordeal:

I didn't want to, but I couldn't tell her why.

Alex shrugged. "Okay, it's no big deal."

But it *was* a big deal, for me. I told her I'd think about it. (58)

When Tish decides to "practice" with Alex, things go in a decidedly un-fairy-tale-like manner:

Two days later, we were in her turret bedroom when I said I'd do it. I've never been so nervous. Alex just laughed, as if it meant nothing to her.

"Close your eyes so you can pretend I'm a guy," she said. "And tilt to the right, okay?"

They were little kisses, tilted to the right at first, then straight on, then to the left. Her lips were soft as feathers. Our noses rubbed. I felt like a blind person discovering for the first time what my best friend looked like. We kissed some more. In her mind, Alex was probably seeing a Grade Thirteen football stud or maybe a square-jawed movie star. But I was thinking, *Wow! This is Alex! Beautiful, special, amazing Alex!*

She jerked her head back. Her face was flushed pink.

"Alex, what's wrong?"

"I can't do it!" she said. "I pretended at first but then . . . ew-w-w-w! It was too gross!" She made a face, wiped her mouth and laughed. "Let's forget we did that, okay, Tish?"

"Sure," I said. (58-59)

The image of the princess in the turret is a powerful cultural reference that resonates with expectations of heroics and high romance. The idea of *kissing* the princess *in* her turret bedroom is the stuff of fantasy. However, in none of those fantasies is the princess supposed to say "ew-w-w-w!" Tish's fairy tale moment is ruined because she is not a prince, not a hero, not a "Grade Thirteen football stud." It is in that very un-fairy-tale-like moment that Tish "knew [she] loved Alex, and she knew it, too" (59). Tish is made painfully aware that the fairy tale was not written with girls like her in mind.

When Alex begins to date, she becomes consumed with the world of her boyfriend and his friends. Tish refuses to participate in Alex's new world of "cheerleader girls and jock guys" (59), although she does agree to do "the mock royal wedding" (59). Lewis shows how a queer girl might try to insert herself into the existing social structures in an attempt to fit in, or at least to keep friends: "Alex was Princess Anne, and she got me the part of a bridesmaid. I did it because I wanted to be with Alex, but I hated the itchy dress and the way they pulled my hair back so I looked like a horse and the way everyone acted like someone they weren't" (59). The discomfort shows, and Tish describes herself using modern fairy tale metaphors: "A horse among beauty queens. The troll at Ken and Barbie's wedding" (60). While the rest of the school is acting out a fantasy, we see that Tish feels profoundly out of place. Lewis provides another perspective on Tish's



involvement in the mock royal wedding in "Snapshot of a Royal Wedding," the first story in *Graveyard Girl*. Ginger, a character who, like Tish, is an outsider in the teen world of this small town, articulates Tish's position in the ordeal: "There's Tish looking like she'd rather be someplace else. Dress makes her look more like a cupcake than a bridesmaid. Wonder why she did it? Tish hates that stuff — dresses, makeup, high heels. Fairy tales . . ." (4; ellipses in original).

Regardless of the impossibility of the fairy tale ideal represented by the royal wedding, Tish has her own fantasy:

It used to be Alex always daydreaming, and now it was me. My daydream about Alex started the same way it had in real life, in her turret bedroom, a smile on her lips, her head tilted to the right, but instead of ending in revulsion and rejection, it ended with acceptance and understanding. (60)

Like Carla in "Toxic Love," Tish's inability to fit into a fairy tale mould does not prevent her from dreaming her own fairy tale into existence. Tish, like Carla, is an outsider who is willing to try to fit into the straight world in order to create for herself some semblance of normalcy. When she realizes that she and Alex cannot continue their friendship after the kiss, Tish attempts a heroic letter of farewell in which she uses more fairy tale allusions: "*I want you to remember me as I used to be, and not like the witch I've become*" (60-61), which backfires when Alex agrees that they should "take a break for a while" (61). But Tish realizes her mistake, understanding that unless she conforms to acceptable standards, she will lose Alex forever: "*I wanted to grab her by the shoulders and say, Forget the stupid letter! I take it back! I'll be nice, I'll play along, I'll go to those stupid parties and find a boyfriend if that's what you want!* But I didn't really want those things. I wanted Alex and our friendship back, the way it used to be" (61-62). The friendship ends, and Tish is devastated. Failure to conform means that Tish is relegated to the land of abjection, away from the popular straight kids and their appropriate teenage dating rituals.

Although it might seem impossible to imagine, Tish's story ends on a partially happy note. Alex is killed by a stray bullet and, at her wake, Keenan (Alex's boyfriend) asks Tish to join him and some of Alex's friends for a get-together in her honour. Tish then realizes that "He knew, but he still wanted me to come. And I realized that of all the people in the world, maybe only Keenan could understand how I felt, because he had loved her, too" (68). The fairy tale is shattered because the princess dies a tragic death,<sup>11</sup> and yet Tish finds compassion and some understanding in an unlikely ally who knows her secret and still includes her in the mourning ritual. Furthermore, based on Ginger's later story ("Graveyard Girl") we also know that, ultimately, Tish and Ginger become friends and that Ginger, who is also a social misfit, accepts Tish for her "real" self.

It is difficult to gauge how Canadian young adult readers will respond to characters like Carla and Tish. However, the fact that Holeman and Lewis both set these stories of queer sexual awakening within the context of collections of stories about the lives of Canadian teens indicates that they intend their readers to understand that the problems faced by queer teens are just as valid as those faced by all the other teen characters in these stories. Each short story in *Saying Goodbye* and *Graveyard Girl* represents one teen's experience; each collection works as a metaphor for the community of teens it seeks to describe. By placing Tish and Carla beside teens with other issues to face, Holeman and Lewis manage to normalize the tribulations of queer youth. Furthermore, as each author also deconstructs the modern fairy tale ideal in stories dealing with straight teens, these collections work holistically to encourage a rethinking of the fantasy of an unambiguously heterosexual happy ending.

We apply our knowledge of the modern fairy tale to our own lives and to our reading and viewing practices, decoding fiction and non-fiction alike by whether or not it conforms to the fairy tale format. "Toxic Love" and "You Never Know" expose our expectations of the ideal worlds represented by mass-marketed stories of happily-ever-after. The use of fairy tale elements, however, strengthens these stories by providing a reference point against which to gauge the lives of realistically-rendered teens. Holeman and Lewis problematize the fairy tale, warning against the too-limited definitions of success, happiness, and love, providing alternate, non-fairy tale happy endings which may encourage their young-adult audience to read critically, to challenge, and, ultimately, to subvert mainstream understandings of idealized normalcy. Most importantly, what comes across in these stories is the sense that, while the lives of these teens are far from ideal, the fairy tale model against which their lives are set does not seem as desirable once we see how the pressure to conform to that ideal can hurt "real" kids.

## Notes

- 1 The current popular understanding of "the fairy tale" has little to do with the vast historical corpus of fairy tales and/or folk tales. As Alison Lurie notes in *Don't Tell the Grownups: Subversive Children's Literature* (1990), "The handful of folktales that most readers today know are not typical of the genre. They are the result of . . . the skewed selection and silent revision of subversive texts" (20). I will not deal with the contentious issue of fairy tale bowdlerization here, but I recognize that I am dealing with a fairly new and sanitized version of the fairy-tale genre.
- 2 Walt Disney productions epitomize the simplification of good and evil. Bottigheimer notes that "Walt Disney's American versions of some of the best-known fairy tales provide an illusion of good and evil which in no way corresponds to the far more subtle surfacing of malevolence in society" (xi). While it is important to note that Walt Disney films are American productions, I certainly think that Canadian interpretations of fairy

- tales are conscripted by Disney norms simply due to the saturation of Canadian markets by Disney products.
- 3 See, for example, the conclusion in the most recent Disney fairy tale movies, which end in a marriage between the hero and the heroine: *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994), and *Mulan* (1998).
  - 4 In her argument against censorship in young adult fiction, Meredith Rogers Cherland notes, following Ortner and Whitehead, "that, for both genders around the world, heterosexuality is rewarded because it is the basis for social organizations built upon kinship systems . . . [and that] . . . [f]ailure to comply, failure to be heterosexual, is severely punished because it threatens the social order" (46).
  - 5 The normalizing function of the fairy tale works in ways similar to Judith Butler's notion of performativity (of sex as a materialized construct) and corresponds with her use of Foucault's "regulatory ideal." Sex (that is hetero-sex) "not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs . . . 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of these norms" (*Bodies that Matter* 1-2). The persistent, unwavering, and simplified heterosexual "happily ever after" of the modern fairy tale is indicative of the repetition that is necessary in order to produce the norm. Or, as Butler puts it, "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (*Bodies that Matter* 2). The repetition of the same "happily ever after" precludes or necessarily excludes all other imaginings of happiness and success. It erases the necessary imaginative space for, as an example, a non-heterosexual happy ending. As Butler adds, with respect to sex and gender identity, "Indeed, the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation" (*Bodies that Matter* 8).
  - 6 In her list of assumptions at stake in the re-thinking of "sex," Butler includes "a linking of this process of 'assuming' a sex with the question of *identification*, and with the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and foreclosures and/or disavows other identifications. This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects', but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (*Bodies that Matter* 3).
  - 7 For more on theories of performativity, parody, and excess, see Butler's *Gender Trouble*.
  - 8 I refer here to a survey of American romance readers and thus am relying on an assumption that romance readers in Canada share the same general expectations of the genre with their counterparts in the United States.
  - 9 Radway cites Elsie Lee's *The Diplomatic Lover* (1971) as a typical and appropriate example of a good romance (601).
  - 10 While there are many critics who have explained how sex/gender identities rely on heterosexual norms, both Wittig and Calhoun provide an interesting dialogue about how "woman-ness" is shaped by heterosexual relations.
  - 11 The violent death of Alex (here figured as the princess) is consistent with discourse surrounding Diana. Helmers notes, "Fantasies are something like schema, formulaic plot outlines awaiting the detail that will gratify readers. Thus, Diana was appealing to many because she was able to portray 'princess' and, later, 'victim,' formulas which are both familiar and pacific to certain elements of the public sphere" (438).

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