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A Rude Awakening: *Sleeping Beauty* as a Metaphor for the Slumber of Post-Feminism

By Kendra Reynolds¹

Abstract

Ann Beattie asserts that “As a culture, we are fairly preoccupied with sleep” (Beattie 2002: 38), yet, this essay contests that, instead of being ‘preoccupied with sleep’, we as a culture *are* asleep. When Beattie states that “there is a period in one’s life when fortunate children, who do not yet understand the extent of their good fortune, really do sleep in this way” (Beattie 2002: 38), she unconsciously forms the basis of this essay’s contention that women of today certainly do not ‘understand the extent of their good fortune’ (good fortune being the feminist successes hitherto achieved). Thus, I illustrate how *Sleeping Beauty* provides the perfect metaphor for the sleep-like state of women’s liberation in the slumber of post-feminism. This essay uses post-feminist texts, such as Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992) and Angela Mc Robbie’s *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2009), in conjunction with the main object of study in the form of Julia Leigh’s recent art-house adaptation *Sleeping Beauty* (2012), whilst making references to other relevant anti-tales where appropriate. It is questioned whether the work of humanizing the heroines and females in society has been in vain or, as a descendant of the fairy-tale genre, the anti-tale (as a subversive retelling) harbours an emancipating potential to disrupt comfortable illusions by confronting us with the problems inherent in our existing reality. In short, it questions the state of female identity in the twenty-first century and investigates whether anti-tales are an adequate weapon to prod a sleeping nation into action.

Key Words: Sleeping Beauty, Post-Feminism, Fairy Tale, Julia Leigh

When Ann Beattie referred to the concept of “deep sleep” as “a period in one’s life when fortunate children, who do not yet understand the extent of their good fortune [...] really do sleep in this way”, she unconsciously provided the metaphor which forms the basis of this essay – *Sleeping Beauty* as a parable for the repose of post-feminism (Beattie 2002: 38). Certainly, Beattie’s “fortunate children” can be read as a symbol for women (who were of course viewed as juveniles in the patriarchal past) and “their good fortune” interpreted as the feminist gains hitherto achieved (Beattie 2002: 38). Thus, this observation is synonymous with the state of women in the post-feminist context: for “the category of young women” today “feminism is decisively aged and made to seem redundant. Feminism is cast in the shadows” existing only with the attached, derogatory label, of “a spent force” (Mc Robbie 2009: 11 & 12) – in short, women of the present do not appreciate the gains of the feminist past. This essay uses Julia

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Leigh's controversial art-house production *Sleeping Beauty* (2012) to suggest that this anti-tale shares the urgency of Susan Faludi's warning in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*, where it is asserted that "the same old cycle of progress followed by setbacks and demoralization is on the verge of repeating itself" (Smith quoted in Faludi 1992: xv). In this film, the Sleeping Beauty heroine (Lucy) appears to have a "blank-faced manner and passive temperament" (Gritten 2011) and tries to hold down numerous menial jobs in order to earn enough money to survive. Ultimately her job as a 'Sleeping Beauty' requires her to take part in a kind of unconscious prostitution, whereby she drinks a narcotic which puts her sleep whilst old men lie their wrinkled bodies beside her youthful glowing radiance. One unusual element of this ritual is that sexual intercourse is not permitted. Leigh's film employs this genre to illustrate the regression of society back into the fairy tale's world of patriarchal rule, whilst simultaneously adopting the genre's quality as a "cultural mirror" (Mc Ara & Calvin 2011: 3), serving to emphasize the corruptness and cruelty of our damaged society in the twenty-first century. This essay asks whether feminist gains have once again been thrown away with the premature and strategic celebration of the belief that, "The barricades have fallen [...] Women have 'made it', the style pages cheer. Women's fight for equality has 'largely been won'" (Faludi 1992: 1). A statement like this probes the question: what purpose do anti-tales (subversive fairy tale retellings) play in a post-feminist society where identity is supposedly secured and can they encourage a renewed feminist activism?

It should be noted however, that "contemporary female distress", as embodied in Leigh's existential Lucy, has been attributed, by perpetrators of anti-feminist 'backlash' myths, as being a lingering symptom left behind from the women's movement: "Feminism, having promised her a stronger sense of her own identity, has given her little more than an identity crisis" (Faludi 1992: 4). Thus, the identity achieved has slipped through our fingers since the turn of the century—we have been pushed back to the very beginning. Yet, feminism was the target which bared the brunt of scorn and ridicule when the invisible culprit of patriarchy could not be found; it is not feminism that has resulted in the deterioration of female identity, but the anti-feminist 'backlash' disguised behind the veil of feminist rhetoric (rather like anti-tales which adopt fairy tale elements and exploit them for their own purposes). Thus, using the technique of "Disarticulation", which "works as a kind of dispersal strategy", the backlash can be interpreted as a paranoid response to female progression, "locking young women into 'new-old' dependences and anxieties" (Mc Robbie 2009: 27 & 10). This pull between modernity and fairy tale tradition is illustrated in Leigh's production. In essence, Women today are trapped in a dichotomy between past and present and do not know where they belong. Since the fairy tale genre is an exponent of toxic patriarchal myths, the backlash can be attacked directly through the use of the demystifying anti-tale form, which explicitly slices to the harsh core lying at the centre of these sugar-coated lies – women have *not* 'made it' and Leigh's film certainly does not allow us to be manipulated by this dreamy delirium for an instant. This essay will explore the state of female identity today by taking account of the voice, whilst also adding sexuality and the body, as well as work and economics as major aspects of the female identity crisis inherent in our disillusioned culture. Hence, there remains the potential for a renewal of feminist sentiment, and, as this essay argues, anti-tales like *Sleeping Beauty* mark the bubbling unease beneath the surface of society. As a subversive and radical discourse, Leigh's film received mixed reviews in the Cannes film festival and it is certainly no coincidence that Edward Lawrenson's *Cannes Notebook* article is entitled 'Warning Signs': for, throughout all of the film entries, a foreboding message dominated, and, certainly in Leigh's film, "There is a sense or a threat that feminism

could be re-awoken, and that it was, in the past, a force to be reckoned with” (Mc Robbie 2009: 27). Ultimately, Leigh’s anti-tale, described as “an insistent dark, unsettling affair” (Lawrenson 2011: 66), exposes the current anti-feminist backlash and marks the hazardous state of female identity in contemporary society; and its aim?—to rouse feminism from its premature bed and to probe a sleeping nation into action.

Firstly, it is necessary to look at the links between both post-feminism and sleep, as well as the treatment of sleep in the wider society, in order to understand the concept of this paper. Post-feminism has often been assumed to be a kind of resting place, a peaceful recuperation period after the feminist battle, or a space for the healing of old wounds inflicted by a determined counter-attack. This is mirrored in the discourse of *Cosmopolitan* writer Erica Jong’s claim that “we have won the right to be terminally exhausted” or the despairing proclamation that “I am tired, so tired” (Faludi 1992: 2-3 & 24). Even Beattie goes as far as assuming that “As a culture, we are fairly preoccupied with sleep. In spite of the media’s insistence to the contrary, I maintain that we don’t really wonder, very often, who’s having lots of sex; we wonder more often, who might be getting lots of sleep. In the city, as the early morning trash compactors crush and clatter, we imagine our country cousins still blissfully slumbering” (Beattie 2002: 38). Certainly in Leigh’s urban setting, sleep, in the conventional sense, is almost a phenomenon. In a place where Leigh’s briar hedge replacement is a rather pathetic berry plant growing out of the cracks of a wall, a tired looking man spontaneously reveals to the heroine that “Some people fake their deaths but I’m faking my life” (Leigh 2012) (maybe also a metafictional awareness that he is a part of a predetermined script). Certainly, the almost catatonic figures in Leigh’s film seem to lack the energy required to function, and Lucy is repeatedly observed walking past the drowning noises of garbage trucks and traffic. Not only is the urban space a barrier to sleep but society itself is in a crisis with overseas wars and an economic recession; the grey hues in the social and public scenes of the film mirror this gloomy reality whilst the ‘Sleeping Beauty’ chamber itself possesses an artificially bright and dreamy blend of warm colourful hues, even though it is, for the viewer, a nightmaric realm. Here Leigh might be undercutting the glittering and comforting surfaces of the traditional fairy tales by warning us that appearances can be deceptive. Perhaps then the obsession with sleep and the perpetuation of fairy tales in modern culture are embraced as escapist fantasies from this diseased society, reminding one of Vera Ferra-Mikurra’s haunting anti-tale poem also entitled ‘Sleeping Beauty’:

Come back in a hundred years, my prince
In a hundred years the cannons will have rusted.
In a hundred years peace will be here
[...]
Blast open the hedge but not with hand-grenades,
Don’t drive tanks up to the gates.
In a hundred years the hedge will part by itself.
Then I’ll be able to love you.

(Ferra-Mikurra reprinted in Zipes 1979: xvi)

Perhaps Leigh had read the last line of the opening stanza, in which Sleeping Beauty chastises, “How can you dare to wake/Me the sleeping beauty/My tears would stream again” (Ferra-Mikurra reprinted in Zipes 1979: xvi), as Lucy, at the film’s resolution wakes up to find the dead man lying beside her and screams hysterically—an early version of the script suggested that “she

rails against being brought back into the world. Her lamentations are unbearable. Excruciating. A long unbearable scene. Screams and howls and wails. Outrage” (Leigh 2012). In this sense, the idealised fairy tale realm and the harsh unbearable reality are poles apart; yet, as Beattie asserts “even there [in fairy tales...] sleep often is a simple plot device that takes place primarily so it can be interrupted” (Beattie 2002: 39). Thus, Leigh uses the fairy tale genre to expose the fact that in this sleep deprived era, women are controlled through this sleep deprivation and the exhaustion of their ‘have it all’ lives, and made to feel that it is time to stop pushing for change: “In our exhaustion, we emphatically do not wish for Prince Charming to come”, instead “we’ll continue to read articles about adjusting our expectations when we wake up” (Beattie 2002: 38)—that is, if we ever do awake out of this patriarchal induced inertia. In short, modern capitalism keeps women in a state of perpetual exhaustion in order to prevent another blight of feminism. By keeping energy levels sapped through the perpetuation of feminist lined rhetoric we are made to believe that “After we’ve worked [...] exercised our way to the perfect body [...] after all that tiring (a.k.a *challenging*) striving for excellence, hasn’t it sort of been implied that we’re supposed to get a good night’s sleep?” (Beattie 2002: 39). In other words, women should stop ‘challenging’ and lie down in a state of passive compliance, accepting “the assumption widely promoted that there is no longer any need for such actions” (Mc Robbie 2009: 26). In this context feminism is depicted as a lethargic and tired pet, with the perpetuation of “This idea of holding onto some mild, and media friendly version of feminism, [which] has been a consistent feature of post-feminist backlash” (Mc Robbie 2009: 31). Yet, despite the harsh realities, Leigh forces us into a wakening confrontation of what we would otherwise ignore; for only in perceiving the destruction and cruelty can change be sought, and, as Mc Robbie’s language implies, feminism has had a long enough recuperation period in the role of lethargic house-cat and it now time to once again encourage activism and awake it from its slumber.

Yet, it should not be supposed that sleep is restricted to night time slumbers; rather, Lucy seems to be in a state of permanent repose—a puppet, moving only on the end of strings; a sleepwalker; a “blank slate through most of the movie whether she’s unconscious or not” (Hunter 2012). This links with Hélène Cixous’s rather sarcastic claim “that the character [of Sleeping Beauty] is always found on or in a bed [...and] is lifted from her bed by a man because, as we all know, women don’t wake up by themselves” (Cixous 1981: 43). Certainly, it is true that “In 1970s feminist fairy tale scholarship, Sleeping Beauty stands out as a frequent target, due, no doubt, to the fact that she slumbers through most of the story” (Yue 2012: 33). Lucy’s consistent zombie-like appearance highlights that her “unconsciousness is not so different from her conscious state [...] She is, by virtue of male control, drowsed through it all, even when ostensibly awake” (Yue 2012: 33). Here, Leigh is probably parodying the emptiness of the traditional heroine and even Emma Donoghue illustrates this point in ‘The Tale of the Needle’, where the heroine never falls asleep in the traditional sense, but discovers her sleep-walking state when the witch attempts to snap her out of her drowsiness: “Wake up princess, snapped the old woman, clapping her hands in front of my nose [...] All of a sudden I felt quite awake” (Donoghue 1997: 180). Here, the backlash aim to separate women by perpetuating individualism is broken, and similarly, Leigh’s film ends with Clara (the brothel madam) resuscitating the heroine to bring her out of her slumber—women can save one another if they break through the backlash barrier of feminist sleep by establishing a reawakening of feminist female solidarity. This emphasis on “the dichotomy of sleep and wakefulness in the *Sleeping Beauty* story maps onto differences of activity and passivity, crucial terms for feminist theorists” (Yue 2012: 33) and this has led many critics to ridicule Leigh’s heroine as “uninteresting and flat”, nothing more

than “a beautiful yet inanimate marble statue” (Hunter 2012). Clearly, this suggests that the previously discussed work of feminist anti-tale writers to create complex and humanized heroines has been undone; or has it? Leigh seems to be, on the one hand, satirizing the one-dimensional quality of the original *Sleeping Beauty*; yet, she simultaneously hints at the true human nature behind the porcelain shell: “As much as critics were disturbed by the hint of necrophilia implied in Leigh’s film, their reviews considered the sleeping woman only from the exterior of her dormant body. But [...Leigh’s film] signal[s] the possible activity of an inner-life, a hidden subjectivity kept from the viewer” (Yue 2012: 35). In this way Leigh’s modern anti-tale shares the subversive qualities of its predecessors in that she is suggesting that traditional flat heroines have an inner-life trapped deep within that exterior doll-like facade. Lucy’s emotional humanity is glimpsed in her kindness to Birdman (an alcoholic friend whose death reduces the seemingly hard-faced heroine to tears), and the scene in which she cries at the news of his impending demise is highly symbolic. Here, Birdman delivers the awful news before providing a running commentary of a nature documentary on the television screen, where a little mouse-like creature is discussed—“Little is known about the animal due to its rarity” (Leigh 2012)—suggesting that only the external traits of the traditional heroines (and Lucy) are understood, when in fact they also have a deeper and more complex identity that we do not yet understand. When he states that “what it really is, is a miniature, multifarious kangaroo” (Leigh 2012), he highlights the complexity of these doll-like creatures by alluding to the fact that fairy stories are miniature versions of an idealised life in which things are reduced to simplistic examples. In short, fairy tales cannot contain the whole essence of the female identity and nature. One final, and significant, trait of this rare little mouse is that it “will make a loud noise as it moves into an offensive position” (Leigh 2012); a parallel perhaps to Lucy’s screaming at the end of the film—a metaphor for the fact that, when women are threatened, they must retaliate in a reawakening of a new feminist movement in order to survive.

The treatment of sleep at a social level, as functioning in the form of an escapist and patriarchal policing device, as well accounting for the catatonic state of the people in Leigh’s filmic society, and its role as a mark of doll-like passivity has been established. However, it has been suggested that Lucy (and traditional sleeping beauties) do possess an inner subjectivity—thus, sleep can be interpreted as a haven or the briar hedge of thorns which protects the heroine’s true nature. As Yue ponders, “What actually occurs during sleep? What travel, what changes occur, and is there any way to tell?” (Yue 2012: 35). Sleep can in fact be viewed as a site of potential and the formation of our identities, as it is an “endomorphosis: the internal formation or the formation of an interiority [...] It enables and preserves a form of change that remains unknown, or not yet revealed, to anyone other than the sleeper herself” (Luc Nancy quoted in Yue 2012: 35). Certainly, the long camera shots in the chamber room distance us from Lucy by placing the viewers at the level of the conventional fairy tale third-person omniscient narration. This once again links to Leigh’s suggestion that the real human being is present deep within the doll-like forms of the traditional tales: “No interior view of Lucy’s sleep is given [...] we only see the sleeper the way the male patrons regard her, limp and laid out on a massive bed” (Yue 2012: 36). Yet although it may be positive that the real Lucy is “encased in the protective cocoon of sleep [...] like the thicket of brambles that grow around *Sleeping Beauty*’s castle in Perrault’s tale”, we never get to know her for who she really is: “Lucy is left unpenetrated in more ways than one [...] We know only a body that becomes a shell, and a subjectivity that remains to some degree when awake and totally concealed when drugged” (Yue 2012: 36). Thus, although sleep is a site of protection and a site of potentiality, it is problematic when Clara communicates to

Thomas, “I think your instinct was right. The perfect sleeper” (Leigh 2012). The film, for instance, was based on Leigh’s recurring nightmare that someone was watching her while she slept and as she stated in an interview: “I was already aware that in our sleep we’re very vulnerable. We spend a fair amount of time in this vulnerable state, but we don’t really think about it. And I started to wonder what would it be like to know something was happening to you in your sleep but you didn’t know what it was, and how would that destabilise your waking life?” (Leigh quoted in Gritten 2012). This vulnerability was made explicit in Basile’s early version of the tale in which the unconscious princess is raped and has two children before even awakening. This links to the scene in which Lucy lies in her bed at night and feels compelled to get up and put on a protective layer of clothing in order to feel secure, or, when she confides to Clara that “I haven’t been sleeping well. At home. I need to see what goes on in there. Just once” (Leigh 2012). In a very moving scene a tearful Lucy watches the sleeping woman beside her on a train intently; when the radio announces that passengers must keep their possessions safe Lucy picks up the woman’s dropped magazine and tenderly wipes the drool off the woman’s chin. As the woman wakes up Lucy hands over the magazine she has taken care of and they exchange a warm smile. This scene of female empathy perfectly illustrates that, although sleep can be protective of an inner-subjectivity, it is in essence a very vulnerable state. In order to translate that inner potential into a productive mode of change and a contribution to the emergence of a true female identity, Lucy needs to be shaken out of her slumber. Women need to break through that barrier of the sleep of post-feminism, which the backlash perpetuates, due to the fact that, just like the women in the film, feminism is vulnerable to attack in this dormant position, and ultimately the true female identity and the interior site of potential inherent in a sleeping state need to be brought out into the open and waking world in order to effect change.

This essay, of course, is examining the slumbering status of feminism in the twenty-first century and thus, having established the various aspects of the concept of sleep, one will now proceed to examine the voice as well the body and sexuality in light of this paper’s concept. The area of work and economics will also be discussed as it is a major aspect of the anti-feminist backlash in the post-feminist context. This will be carried out with the aim of highlighting our regression from the creation of a more humanized female identity back into that world of fairy tale oppression; ultimately suggesting that feminism needs to rise from its slumber in order to prevent our slippage into the patriarchal societal codes of the past. Starting with the voice it should be noted that throughout many scenes in the film, especially in regards to the heroine, “Barely a word is spoken, but the sound is cranked up to the maximum” (Waters 2012). When Lucy walks down the street, the urban space successfully drowns out any other communication symbolising how women’s voices struggle to be heard in the public domain. The lack of communication throughout the film is mirrored in the guests at the silver-service dinner party who only silently move their mouths or else cease speaking at all—without communication progress cannot be achieved. It is worth noting that Faludi asserted that, “Efforts to hush the female voice in [...] films [has] been a perennial feature of cinema in backlash periods [...] A crop of films soon featured mute and deaf-mute heroines, and the movie women took to their beds, wasting away from [...] slow poisons” (Faludi 1992: 142). This is rather like the poison of fairy tales which women are force fed and “not told that the tale itself is a poisoned apple [...unaware of her passive role] in the patriarchal plot” (Haase 2004: 3). Thus, in lacking a voice, Lucy has lost any liberating storyteller potential. She relinquishes the potential to “rewrite, unwrite, and replace”—In short, she lacks the ability to change her situation and renounces the potential of women “to imagine and construct their own identities [by] encouraging [them] to

look at their own responses to the stories” (Haase 2004: viii & 7). Indeed, Leigh exposes the “male dominance of the [fairy tale] genre” (Haase 2004: 19) through the use of an extended monologue which is, of course, given to the highest ranked patriarch in the film (the host of the dinner party). This man grabs Clara’s hand and pulls her back in order to force her to listen to his story—he insists on being heard. Directly addressing the camera, this man exposes his role as traditional male collector when he discusses his discovery of “A collection of short stories [which male collectors stole from the original female tellers]” before exposing his role as male narrator of the fairy tale genre in employing the conventional phraseology: “I had definitely read it, once upon a time” (Leigh 2012). Leigh foregrounds her anti-tale strategy through this man when he states that “I started to reread one of the stories” (Leigh 2012) highlighting that even though Lucy is not privileged with a voice with which to critique her position, the distanced viewers perhaps occupy the most liberating site for challenging the male discourse. The use of fairy tales as an escape is illustrated in his story of “the life of a man who one morning wakes up and can’t bring himself to get out of bed. He shuts his eyes in self-defence. He re-evaluates his life, is seized by restlessness, he packs his bags and cuts all ties. He can no longer live among the people he knows, they paralyse him” (Leigh 2012). Here, Leigh suggests that our ‘ties should be cut’ from the original tales as their scripts severely repress the voices of modern, and the original storytelling, women, producing a ‘paralyzing’ effect as illustrated in Lucy’s character. Ultimately this scene exposes the fact that men’s voices are the forces behind the traditional tales and it is necessary to read them with this new knowledge in mind. This idea of female silence links to the backlash against feminist verbalism which is adequately summed up in Bruno Bettelheim’s chauvinistic assumption that “While many fairy tales stress great deeds the heroes must perform to become themselves, *Sleeping Beauty* emphasizes the long, quiet concentration on oneself that is also needed [...] a long period of quiescence, of contemplation, of concentration on the self, can and often does lead to the highest achievement” (Bettelheim 1976: 225-226). One can clearly perceive the advantages to patriarchy that pervades this notion and it seems to have been dangerously internalized by women like Clara who suggest that “Such a sleep works wonders. You’ll feel profoundly restored” (Leigh 2012). Yet, Leigh does not permit Lucy to remain silent forever; rather, she puts an end to the tradition of *Sleeping Beauty* in which men are responsible for “stealing her voice and speaking for her” (Conboy 2009: 53-54). Although “It is often difficult to make out what characters are saying [...] the hushed voices become retrospectively clear when the film reaches its climax” (Bellmore 2012). The male storyteller discussed above is silenced by death at the end of the film, whilst Lucy’s resuscitation through Clara may be symbolic of a feminist rebirth of the voice—Lucy is both reawakened and reborn, literally coming into the world kicking and screaming in a rebellious torrent. Despite Clara’s attempts, Lucy now rejects the silent role of the traditional script and refuses to be silent for anyone. Ultimately, in rejection of her treatment Lucy “puts a stop” to her torment, “her yells prevent it”; “With her voice which is now loud and clear, Lucy’s mouth is closed off to further violation [her mouth having been examined by male clients, constituting a kind of metaphorical rape]; she has now found her voice, and, in doing so, can prevent further [...] abuse” (Bellmore 2012).

In regards to the female body and sexuality, it would be difficult to reject Faludi’s claim that “the hands of time [are] indeed starting to inch counter clockwise” (Faludi 1992: 260). Women’s bodies have once again become male possessions, with Lucy being described by one reviewer as an “office drone, lonely waitress, research rat” (Gross 2012)—whatever she does she is embodying the idealised feminine role of providing a service. Even her appearance is that of the Victorian idealised stereotype: “Twenty going on twelve”; “pale enough to make you worry

if she's ever seen the sun"; and in her white lingerie, which contrasts to the more revealing black garments of the older women, "she dresses up as the fair virgin" (Gross 2012). As Faludi asserts (note the fairy tale allusions), in a period of backlash there is a "demand that we return to a fabled time when [...] The 'feminine' woman is forever static and childlike. She is like the ballerina in an old-fashioned music box, her unchanging features tiny and girlish, her voice tinkly, her body stuck on a pin, rotating in a spiral that will never grow" (Faludi 1992: 92) – if women like Lucy do not wake up they will never break out of their oppressive cyclical routine. Yet, the Victorian paradox of the virginal appearance juxtaposed with the possibility of corruption makes Lucy's character even more appealing for the male viewer; this femme fatale undercurrent is symbolised in the rather disturbing, yet slightly humorous, insistence that Lucy matches her lipstick to the colour of her labia—literally wearing her sexuality on her face. The liberated sexuality achieved in previous decades seems to have once again vanished and it is highly problematic that the film "fails to show us any of Lucy's desire, inevitably giving us an uneven playing field, where all of the power is left to the rich, old, white males. Additionally, as Lucy sleeps and is prodded, we too know more about her than she does, lumping us in with the creepy clientele" (Gross 2012). Yet, this voyeurism is designed to deliberately unnerve the viewer; just as anti-fairy tales poise between an embrace of the traditional fairy tales and new retellings, Leigh is perhaps highlighting that "cinematic narration both reflect[s] and sustain[s] social forms of oppression of women" (Smelik 1998: 17)—In order to critique the male gaze and the objectification of women it must be confronted directly. Thus, although Lucy often provides the perfect spectacle of the unconscious woman fetish (the glass walls of the Excelon apartment explicitly mirroring the glass coffins and display cases of traditional fairy tales), Leigh deliberately challenges such notions by making her film uncomfortable viewing. This is perfectly illustrated in the opening sequence, where a male lab assistant (who later alludes to the heroine's lack of humanity by rather possessively dubbing her to be "my little Frankenstein" (Leigh 2012)) feeds a long cord down the heroine's throat to measure her lung capacity. The amplified horrific gagging sounds are additionally heightened due to the silent backdrop of the scene, and the whole process contains horribly explicit and sexual connotations. In addition Lucy can be viewed as challenging her role as passive object through a subversion of the male gaze when she places her own camera within the chamber—here, the men become the victims as their age proves to be a challenge to their masculinity, resulting in Clara's constant reassurance, "You're safe. There is no shame here. No-one can see you" (Leigh 2012). Clearly then, Leigh blurs the boundaries between victim and perpetrator and ultimately exposes the fact that both men and women are victims of the power relations. Yet, in this sterile film, with its labs, glass apartments and shining offices, Lucy is forced to simply play the traditional fairy tale role of unsexed princess, with the denial of her sexuality explicitly revealed in Clara's random proclamation, "Your vagina will not be penetrated. Your vagina will be a temple" (Leigh 2012). Furthermore, with the prevalence of pornography (Leigh stating that one of her influences was her awareness of websites with pictures of sleeping girls) and highly sexualised television adverts in modern culture, and the fact that, as Malcolm Harris states, "Sometimes Lucy looks like she could be on one of those billboards" (Harris 2012), the female body has become a product for capitalist consumerism. Being deliberately burnt by a client's cigarette, offering her body up as a science experiment, and by allowing herself to be "as flexible as a rag doll when a client throws her body around the room" (Harris 2012), Lucy is little more than an empty vessel for male use. Leigh's film might be warning of backlash in this respect due to Faludi's claim that, "In times of backlash, images of the restrained woman line the walls of the popular culture's gallery. We see her silenced,

infantile, immobilized [...] She is a frozen homebound figure, a bedridden patient, an anonymous still body” (Faludi 1992: 93)—In short, women’s sleeping state is endorsed as a male fantasy and ultimately returns them to the objectified state of traditional fairy tale heroines. Only when Lucy is around other women is there any implication of sexual tension or desire, and perhaps this lesbian undercurrent is what probes her to utter the many spontaneous marriage proposals throughout the film (one to a man whom she has not spoken to in years)—perhaps her tendencies towards lesbianism compel her towards the conventional marriage in order to reconcile herself with her society. Thus, once again, that crucial final scene might also be interpreted as a reawakening of her sexuality. After all, the traditional tale symbolises the awakening of the heroine’s sexuality with the prince’s kiss, and here it is Clara who performs mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Thus, it is this contact with another woman that rescues her from the brink of death. Refusing to repress her verbal expression, perhaps her sexuality will now also be given a free reign, and, although this scene is quite unsettling perhaps, in refusing to sleep safely within conventional boundaries, the existential Lucy has finally found herself.

Finally, Reggie Nadelson’s assertion is extremely worrying for feminism due to the state of our current recession stricken society; it is stated that the previous anti-feminist backlash, which emerged in the 1980s, was a “re-run [that] got underway, as backlashes always do, when the economic pie begin[s] to shrink” (Nadelson quoted in Faludi 1992: iv). Certainly, as Praet acknowledges, “Scholars have already noted how fairy tale-like narratives tend to rear their heads especially in times of historical crisis” (Praet 2011: 41); yet, perhaps this ‘historical crisis’ is not simply the recession but also the fear that “All work has become women’s work, even that of men” (Harris 2012). It is no longer enough to keep women in menial labour because today every job is sacred. Anti-tales with their inherent trait of using “old forms for a new function” (Prokhorova 2011: 51) means that they are extremely useful for Leigh, who highlights that the class hierarchies of the traditional tales are beginning to establish themselves once again in today’s society. In effect, the patriarchy has been replaced under the name of capitalism and the financial advantages of marriage have become, once more, an attractive security blanket. This is perfectly illustrated in the character of Lucy who spends the whole film carrying out the basest kinds of labour in order to survive. When she seems to have had enough of her Cinderella role she spontaneously proposes to a man whom she has not conversed with in years—It is no coincidence that this seemingly clean-cut and financially secure option has an edge on the unstable and jobless Birdman, whose mock proposals to Lucy are undercut with a resigned knowingness that he cannot fit the princely and masculine role of provider: “Will you marry me?/Yes/Thank you/Not at all/It’s very kind of you/It’s a pleasure” (Leigh 2012). Even Lucy’s photocopying job symbolises the working-class masses and their lack of individuality which calls to mind the observation of the hero in *Fight Club*: “a copy of a copy of a copy” (Fincher 1999). Certainly this is not only class based but intimately tied up with gender: the women who act as articles of furniture at the dinner party, Lucy’s identical ‘sleeping beauty’ who is seen being helped out to the car, and the fact that Lucy is not a person but a marketing item, whose appearance is the only aspect of her person scrutinized at the interview with Clara, highlights that, as a worker, her identity is totally obliterated. Not even her name, that crucial aspect of one’s identity, is retained, “Oh, and your name. We’d like to call you Sarah” (Leigh 2012). Women still often get paid less than men and when Clara advises Lucy not to rely solely on her job, to “Think of it as a windfall. Pay off some student loans” (Leigh 2012), it is “a remarkably open acknowledgement [...] that Lucy is in debt to a third party” (Harris 2012). It certainly marks the blatant commercialisation and public ownership of the female body when Harris suggests

that “The old men who sleep with her might as well be the banks holding Lucy’s loans, taking payment in time with her flesh” (Harris 2012)—women’s bodies become a kind of currency for exchange. Thus, the scene in which Lucy sits on the sofa and slowly, but deliberately, burns a bank note, is not a mere sign that Lucy is doing the jobs for more than monetary gain as some critics have suggested; rather, it symbolises her attempt to burn the male face on the bank note—a futile attempt to assert that she is free of capitalist/patriarchal control and is in possession of her own identity. Perhaps, as fairy tales were often assumed to be “the voice of the people” (Martin 2012: 23) in primitive cultures and because “the anti-tale is on the revolutionary side of politics” (Çizakça 2011: 264) her ending marks a revolutionary act of protest: “She opens her eyes and she screams and she doesn’t stop” (Harris 2012).

To conclude, anti-tales have been appropriately dubbed “wake up stories” (Kérchy 2011: 66) and in the words of Zipes, they are designed to “Shake up the world and sharpen our gaze” (Zipes 2012: 136). In a similar vein, this essay has illustrated Leigh’s “intent on disturbing viewers [...] reminding them that the world is out of joint and fairy tales offer no alternative to drab reality” (Zipes 2012: 136). Yet, what they can offer, as illustrated in *Sleeping Beauty*, is the opportunity of change, for the “piercing truths of their imaginative visions [...] compel us to re-create traditional narratives and [to] rethink the course our lives have taken” (Zipes 2012: 155). Whether it be the silencing of the female voice, the possession of the female body, or the objectification of women in the world of work as a marketable resource, Leigh highlights that our current post-feminist society is under the threat of another anti-feminist backlash, and, ultimately, that we are at risk of returning to the outdated sexism of the fairy tale kingdom. This essay has shown how women have been lulled to sleep by accepting the facade that they have ‘made it’ in terms of liberation; that “you’ve got real democracy and there are really no glass ceilings” (Orr 2010)—subverted in the fact that Lucy’s purchase of the Excelon apartment/glass shell which embodies the function of display case/prison for her doll-like body. There *are* barriers to the emergence of a true female identity and the most poignant fact is that these problems are not new. The name ‘Clara’ was significantly that of Clara Zetkin, a socialist feminist who fought female oppression around the time of the suffragettes and another parallel to this feminist group lies in the fact that, when they were put in prison, “warders physically forced tubes down their throats to force feed them”—a clear link to Lucy’s role as lab rat (Orr 2010). Thus, Leigh is perhaps symbolising how women like Clara are once again needed to fight for the rights of the new female generation, and also that Lucy possesses within her the ability of the suffragettes to fight oppression. Reversing the status of traditional fairy tales as a “poisoned apple” (Haase 2004: 3) in disguise, Leigh’s film has been described as “a hothouse flower, beautiful and delicate and yet surprisingly hardy and potentially toxic” (Rocchi 2011)—*Sleeping Beauty* as an anti-tale exploits that inherited quality of the traditional tales by poisoning the patriarchy’s backlash myths, exposing them for what they are. Perhaps, like Lucy, we have had a lucky escape, for if women keep overdosing on the anaesthetic of fairy tales and patriarchal myths, then ignoring the reality may become fatal and feminism might die forever. As the menu of the DVD implies, with its use of the camera as a drowsily opening and closing eye-capturing snapshots of scenes from the film, Leigh immediately implies that we need to wake up and register the truth of our situation in the twenty-first century. Closing the film with the static scene caught on Lucy’s camera where the two figures both recline death-like on the bed, we are forced to realise that this was the potential conclusion had Clara not resuscitated the heroine. The post-feminist sleep threatens to turn into a permanent coma; through her anti-tale Leigh provides the resuscitation needed to revive feminism from its premature bed in order to ensure that the real

Sleeping Beauty, the true female identity, will not sleep forever. As the title of a modern anti-tale collection implies, *Don't Bet on the Prince*; rather, our hopes reside in the older generation of women who can wake the feminist tendencies that these young women have inherited—Sleeping Beauty did not sleep forever and thus, there remains the hope that feminism too can be roused from its slumber.

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