

Linda Ayscue Gupta

Dr. Marcel Cornis-Pope

MATX 601 Texts and Textuality

09/06/07

Intertextual/Intermedia Analysis of *The Briar Rose*

Robert Coover's *The Briar Rose* is an intensely psychological rewrite of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Little Briar-Rose* and Charles Perrault's *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*. Coover assumes the reader's familiarity with the story in both texts and opens his version with the Prince's surprise at "how easy it is" as he enters the thorn hedge (1). He uses the Prince's memories, thoughts, musings, and conversations with himself as a vehicle to revisit elements of the traditional tales.

Similar Elements in the Traditional Tales

All three tales have the characters of the king, queen, princess, prince, and various people who work in the castle. All of the stories have at least one fairy and one old woman or old crone figuring prominently as either protectors or malefactors of the Princess. The Princess in each of the tales is renowned for her beauty and her virtue or goodness. In her "exploring" she encounters an old woman spinning and is wounded by the spindle. But she does not die; in all three tales a good fairy transmutes her death sentence to a 100 year sleep.

In all three tales the Princess sleeps although there are differing degrees of consciousness in that sleep. It is while she sleeps that Coover begins his story and introduces an elaborate development of her intrapsychic processes while she waits.

The three tales each contain a thorn hedge around castle and the negotiation of the hedge is a key element in all three stories. Many would-be rescuers have already died there. The Prince in each of the three versions is undaunted and proceeds through the hedge, but their motivations

differ. In each story the thorn hedge flowers and parts to let the chosen Prince through. At that point the similarities end as Coover elaborates his Prince's journey, a journey in some ways alike but in most ways quite different from that of his predecessors.

Once the Prince is through the hedge, *if* he makes it through the hedge, and once the Princess is awakened, *if* she chooses to awaken, we *may* again find some similarities in Coover's rewrite and those events in the traditional tales. I say "*if*" and "*may*" because it depends on the choice of several alternative versions and outcomes that Coover offers the "wreader." He *may* eventually find the princess, he *may* be amazed at her beauty, he *may* kiss her, she *may* awaken along with all others in the castle, they *may* marry, they *may* live "happily ever after," . . . or *not*.

Rewritten Aspects of the Traditional Tales and New Elements in *Briar Rose*

Coover's rewrites range from slight modifications of both hypotexts to the introduction of radical and unexpected new elements. Levi-Strauss would define *Briar Rose* as a "bricoleur" – a "cobbling " together of pieces of the original in new relationships (cited in Chandler). Genette defines a "hypotext" as a "text or genre on which it [a text] is based but which it transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends" (qtd. in Chandler). Coover's rewrite transform the tale in two major ways: 1) the introduction of several new literary devices furthered by the use of hypertext and hypermedia, and 2) the introduction of a primary content focus on the intrapsychic and interpersonal processes of the Prince and Princess. We will look first at the literary devices introduced by Coover.

Events, Imagination, Time, and Stories

Both hypotexts from which Coover draws are linear. But in Coover's tale, it is often difficult to tell whether the Prince and Princess are describing an actual event, a dream, or a fantasy and to determine exactly when any of these is happening. For example, in lexia 33 the Prince is exploring the castle before scaling the walls. He describes a déjà vu –like experience in

that the castle is “unlike any he has ever seen before yet . . . more like home than home” (33). He questions the illusion of it. Just when he thinks he has broken through the thorn hedge and emerged from “the dark night of the briars,” he finds himself facing a “barren landscape under the noonday sun” (32). He begins to doubt his perceptions of reality and grounds his actions in his old reality, the thorn hedge. He continues to fight this battle though no hedge is visible, demonstrating the power of the interpretation he has assigned to his experience. The Princess also is seduced to an old reality – back to the room with the crone and the spinning wheel where the old crone tells her this story of the prince. Intuitively she knows that she should not enter, “something bad has happened here,” but she is unsure whether her reality will disappear out from under her if she goes back (32). She wonders “if the spiral staircase she has climbed is still there behind her” (32). Later, when she thinks he has arrived in her room, a goose tells her “You will never awaken because the story you were in no longer exists” (33).

The reader is left wondering also, “What is reality? Is this happening or am I imagining this? Is this another fairy story? Is this a dream . . . a fantasy . . . or a nightmare? Is this an actual memory . . . a flashback . . . or a fear? Coover thus arranges for the reader to experience the same anxiety and confusion that disables the Prince and Princess.

Confounding this confusion about time is the fact that many of the stories told by the fairy/crone are disappointing, troubling, frightening. She is raped by a band of drunken peasants (15), taken by her father’s household knights, taken by a wild bear who is married and whose wife tries to bite her (19), abandoned by one prince who leaves the room with onlookers (23), aroused by a monkey who fondles and paws her while “her parents and others laugh uproariously” (25). Rose is in a helpless rage at some of these stories (13). She complains repeatedly that “real stories aren’t like that” . . . Real princes aren’t” (26). Rose has a right to complain as many of the stories are traumatizing, all the more so because she is receiving these

injunctions at the height of her vulnerability. Chandler says that “Texts are instrumental in not only the construction of other texts but in the construction of experiences.” The stories have the same effect psychologically as if they had actually happened. The stories she longs for are the stories of the prince(s) approaching her bedside, trembling with excitement and awe at her beauty, while she voyeuristically observes her power to excite them.

Theme: Embracing the Shadow

In both the Grimm brothers and Perrault texts, characters are either good or bad, i.e. the good fairy, the wicked fairy. Neither the Prince nor Princess exhibits anything other than good qualities. Coover, however, introduces the concept of the shadow. While he may not use that term specifically, the journeys of the Prince and Princess toward each other offer each the opportunity for reckoning with their own forbidden thoughts and feelings. To the extent that they are able to own these disowned parts of themselves and take responsibility for their actions, they free themselves to choose their futures rather than reenact their pasts. “One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.” (Jung 470). Jungian analysts would encourage the Princess to see the “good” fairy and the “old crone” as parts of herself. Rose is repeatedly drawn to the “loving old crone . . . vaguely threatening, yet dearer to her in her dreams than any other” (4). There is some promise that the crone will help her if she will but own her. She needs her wisdom.

Coover revisits this idea of owning the shadow again when he explains that the bad fairy was also good and the good fairy, really wicked. It was the gift of the good fairy (initially thought to be the wicked fairy) to spare her the “ever-after part of the human span,” the doings of the wicked fairy in her to have her live through this “death in life and life in death” (40).

Changing Points of View

Coover writes various lexias from the point of view of the Princess and some, from that of the Prince. Some are even from the point of view of the fairy/crone. This is not a new literary device as it has been used in works such as Carson McCuller's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. There are multiple voices within characters engaged in an internal battle of conflicting needs and desires. However, the device creates a spell-binding tension in the interplay of perceptions and misperceptions as the Prince and Princess approach each other in the relationship or, the illusion of their relationship.

Multiple Outcomes

Coover introduces multiple outcomes in his story. In one version, he never goes into the chamber. In another version, he goes in but leaves her. In a third version, she is awake when he enters. In a fourth version, they appear to be married or at least living together with their children as a family, albeit unhappily. Both are trapped.

One of the minor modifications to content is the rewrite of Perrault's story of the couple's two children – a daughter, Morning and a son, Day. In Coover's version the children reappear in the stories told by the old crone about Beauty's children. And they reappear as Rose's children, Dawn and Day, remnants from the visits of various married princes. However, Coover's major modifications, elaborations, and additions to content tend to cluster around several themes.

Theme: Lack of Protection

The King and Queen in both *Little Briar-Rose* and *The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods* are protective of their daughter. The King orders all spindles destroyed and in Perrault he bans them in an attempt to prevent her harm. In the Grimm brothers' tale, all animation is suspended while the Princess sleeps. In Perrault's tale, once the Princess is laid safely in the finest apartment on a bed of gold and silver, all fall asleep. The fairy creates the hedge of thorns so that the princess

will have nothing to fear from curious people. Coover eliminates this protection. In his tale, she remembers being abandoned by her parents on her fifteenth birthday, being uncared for (17). Her parents “as always in her dreams, . . . vanished, . . . and she is being stabbed again and again by the treacherous spindle, impregnated with a despair” (2). The king and queen, attendants, and animals are awake and variously observing her, ministering to her, having conversations with her, and sometimes physically and sexually violating her. Perhaps most alarming to her, yet at some level acceptable, are the references to oedipal fantasies or dreams of incest. The prince feels when he sees the turrets that they are “like the clenched fists of an unforgiving but stonily silent father, upon whose tender terrain below he is darkly trespassing” (3). She is said to have “been visited by her own father, couched speculatively between her thighs, . . . as, with velvety thrusts, he searches out the spindle” (7). To make matters worse, she is conscious of her mother “standing at the bedside, with cloths and lotions at his service and offering her advice” (7). The reader is left wondering if this dream, that she is sure is a dream, is not in fact reality.

Theme: The Prince’s Discovery of Himself in the Thorn Hedge

In all three tales, the hedge separates and allows the Prince to walk through. In Perrault, the hedge closes again as soon as he passes, then turns back into thorns. The Prince in both Perrault’s and Coover’s tales take this to be a clear sign he is the chosen one. And why not? All are given are passage and it appears that they will be spared the trials and danger of their predecessors.

Coover elaborates the concept of motivation introduced by the Grimm brothers and Perrault. In Grimm the Prince emphasizes that he is not afraid. In Perrault’s version he is “all on fire at these words” believing he can help and “pushed on by love and honor.” But in Coover’s text his motivation is more complex. He wants to provoke a confrontation with “enchantment itself” . . . to “make his name” (1). He is aware what it has already cost others through the sight

of their bones and the smell of their corpses. But he is inspired because, as the hedge parts, he believes he may have been chosen. He is aware that there are rumors that all is not well and that it could end in love's pain, "it infamous cruelty" (3). Coover's prince dreams of "teach[ing] her who she is" with the expectation that "she will love and honor him forever without condition" (6). The text wryly comments that this is a test of his judgment – that he would choose "an imagined future good over a real and present one" (6). He is nearly seduced by the flowers in the hedge but, "pricked . . . by his own sense of vocation, his commitment to love and adventure and honor and duty," he continues (6). He also, is looking for affirmation outside himself.

At this point Coover then radically departs from the previous tales. The journey through the hedge becomes the navigation of a relationship with Briar Rose and a discovery of his own needs within a relationship. The more he believes he is the chosen one - "I am he who will awaken Beauty!" - the more the thorns tear at his clothing (9). He is back and forth between imaginings – "he enters her bedchamber and as he does this, the hedge is "resisting his every movement . . . closing in behind and above him as he advances" (12). He wonders if he is on the right path. He begins to doubt his chosenness – "Perhaps I am not the one" (12). The thorns slash him and his feelings change now from "erotic longing" to "sympathetic curiosity" (14). He wonders if she dreams of him. By Lexia 16 he is entering a downward spiral, "driven more by fear now than by vocation." "He seeks to stay his panic . . . as much in love with her deep repose as with any prospect of her awakening." He has imagined her as inert and passionate but now will settle for her as "a kind friend who might heal his lacerations and calm his anguished heart." But he does begin to question, "is she truly the beautiful object of pure love she is alleged to be, or is she, the wicked fairy's wicked creature, more captor than captive, more briar than blossom, such that waking her might have proven a worse fate than the one that is seemingly his . . ." (16).

Several lexias later, he keeps trying to remember her as the hedge closes in. He knows she waits “but not for him” (21). He is trying to “assuage his terrible pain and disappointment and stay his rising panic,” but he sees her differently in his imagination now – “deathly pallor, sunken flesh, crumbling gown, . . . empty eye sockets” (21). He wants her to love him but she is preoccupied with his excitement about her and “her own unwilling passivity.” He wants her to *act* – “No! he cries. Don’t just lie there! Get up! Come help!” (21).

It is at this point that Coover begins to introduce the first of several potential outcomes. In this first outcome he appears to have kissed her – *finally*. This is not Perrault’s prince who, with trembling and admiration falls down on his knees before her. This is not the awakening kiss that fetches her from sleep in the Grimm brothers’ tale. This kiss is so unremarkable as to merit discounting. She whines, “you really didn’t meant it” and he apologetically concurs, “I guess my mind was elsewhere” (24). Now he realizes that he is “hopelessly enmeshed” in the briars and “consoles himself with thought of what might have been” (24). He accepts the fact that he has been in denial, “blind eye cast toward the abyss”, and resigns himself to strive instead for the “love of love” (24).

In Lexia 28 Coover introduces a second outcome for the couple and the reader that is nowhere to be found in the previous texts. He breaks through the hedge and wants to complete his adventure for love and honor. But he is stopped by his compassion – “What is happily ever after, after all, but a fall into the ordinary, into human weakness, gathering despair, a fall into death? His fate to be sure, whether he makes his name or nor . . . but it need not be hers” (28). As he imagines the future he sees both the joys and the disappointments – “her obligations, his, the days following upon days, the exhaustion of the ‘inexhaustible fountain of their passion,’ the disappointment and frustrations and betrayals, the tedium, the doubts . . . the disfigurements of

time, the draining away of meaning and memory, the ensuing silences, the death of dreams; and . . . he slips back in the briars' embrace" (28).

Now he "no longer even wishes to reach her, to wake her" (30). He resents her. He longs for his life before the quest. He no longer believes he is the one chosen, nor does he want to live the "happily-ever-after part" (30). He understands the "true meaning of her name" (*Briar Rose*) for he intuits that if he does not do exactly what she wants, she will "scratch his eyes out" (30). He is searching for a way out and hopes that the briars might fade away if, in fact, they are "something in himself" (30).

Now the Prince also wonders, "Who am I?" He has been tricked, seduced, managed, and coerced into being what she thinks she needs despite his wounded-ness. He is vulnerable. Coover's prince is a far cry from the princes in *Little Briar-Rose* and *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*. Has he "made his name?" (1). Has he "taught her who she is?" (6). By Lexia 35, the Prince has learned that in this castle, nothing is simple, nothing is as it seems. He believes she is trying to help him out of the thorny maze or share the "way to her own affections," yet she makes him doubt that he is the one. He hopes to become the one she is dreaming of and in the mirror she holds up to him, he sees that he is a beast. She is dressing him up for the ball "with all the needles left inside" and as he enters, he is engulfed in pain and realizing that "there will be no departing," he howls for help, "Get me out of here!" (35).

Theme: The Princess' Loss of Self in the Prince(s)

In Perrault's version of the story, the Princess appears to have some consciousness of time – "You have waited a long while." She also has the ability to anticipate his arrival as she "had time to think on what to say to him." However, Coover significantly elaborates her degree of consciousness, or lack of it – her intrapsychic processes and the reciprocal impact of these on her relationships.

When Coover first speaks of Briar Rose, he paints her asleep and dreaming “of abandonment and betrayal” (2). She has separated her Self from the body; she has “departed” . . . “to a scatter of confused intentions” and longs for integrity; there is a “scurry of vermin in the rubble of her remote defenses” (2). These are not descriptions of a well person. She is looking both inside and outside herself for something to “make her whole again” (2). In Coover’s story there are multiple disappointments for the princess – numerous princes that do not bring her what she hopes for or needs. The “stabbing pain of the spindle prick . . . anchors her and locates a self” (4). She is organizing her psyche around her pain and repetitive dreams of rescue by her prince. She is fixated on repetitive dreams of her prince because in that moment of “the bewitching power of desire, . . . the realm of first kisses . . . she is beautiful . . .” (5). She needs to see his desire; she uses him to reflect a more desirable self than she can currently locate within herself. The fairy knows that she cannot appreciate her beauty, its “power to provoke desire in men” (18). She is never satisfied and is constantly “doubting [her fate], or if she is not doubting it, dreading it, afraid of what she longs for” (18). She is repeatedly asking the fairy who she is, what she is, as she has no memory. The fairy tells her that she is a “still creature, waiting silently for your hapless prey. . . . You are all things dangerous and inviolate. . . . the rose and thorn” (8).

In all three versions of the tale, the Princess is either rescued or anticipates being rescued. In Perrault there is some evidence that she has been waiting. In each text she is passive. But in Coover’s text she is “excited by his excitement and *by her own feeling of helplessness*” (23). She has been erotized toward passivity and it will be very difficult now for her to relinquish the role of the victim. In her very helplessness she is most powerful; she commands desire.

Fed by a diet of stories from the wicked/good fairy, she creates barriers, alternative thorn hedges, with her imaginings that are “just behind her left ear” (31). Suddenly Coover initiates a new stage in Rose’s self-awareness. Again it seems the prince has come and it is very real. But

faced with this possibility, she is afraid that “there would be no uncoming. . . . What if he is not as she’s imagined him to be?” (27). The idea that she might actually engage in a relationship is alarming. It is telling that the next prince who arrives seems “disinterested in her” . . . and eventually declares, “I’m at the wrong castle” (27). He seems unperturbed by her.

The Profound Disappointment of Marriage

Coover’s “happily-ever-after” is not that of the Grimm brothers or Perrault. He describes in numbing detail the state of their marriage in Lexia 37. The Princess has her king, her crown, the hall. But all is as stone except two animated children. “It’s never quite like you imagine it,” the King says and she concurs (37). The weight of her crown is heavy as it drags her head into her food. She has to hold it up. He is not a prince. He sighs, belches, and scratches his “hairy belly . . . But at least we have our memories. We do?” (37). She claws him, enraged, but he answers her with this – “I feel the reason I never escaped the briars was that, in the end, I loved them, or at least I needed them. . . . They grew on me” (37).

In Lexia 38 the Prince is trapped, himself victimized, not rewarded for his pain and suffering in rescuing her. Originally he felt at home but now he is taken for granted, suspicioned. When he announces his intention to leave he is met with her fury and swooning and then is pressured by all present to take her to her bedchamber. He capitulates yet again (38).

Coover borrows the modern myth of the mid-life crisis, replete with the promise of an affair with a younger woman. He has the Prince (now King) strike out again. Now an older man, he is given an ointment that promises among other things to “restore hair, heal unnatural wounds, and revive manly vigor” (41). It ultimately does not matter if he reaches a new sleeping princess. It only matters that the “branches part gently, the fragrant petals caress his cheeks” and that he is surprised at “how easy it is. How familiar” (41). It is only important to him that he recaptures the

ability to see himself in this light – “I am he who awakens Beauty, the bones seem to whisper as the blossoms enfold him” (41).

In the end (if the reader chooses this end) Rose persists in reenacting the dream of being awakened by an enchanted prince. In Lexia 40 Coover has her drift “through the castle of her childhood” in search of . . . “distraction from her lonely fears . . . of abandonment, of not knowing who she is”. At times she feels that others are frozen in their tracks; at other times there is activity all around her – “all making demands upon her, demands she cannot possibly fulfill, or even understand”. She is “waiting for she knows not what in the name of waiting for her prince to come.” She endures “sequential disenchantments . . . the very essence of her being” (40). Coover indicates that the fairy’s spell binds her to this, that she can never be other than this (40).

A Contemporary Cultural And Political Perspective

It is in the new elements added by Coover that most of the contemporary cultural and political perspectives are found. He chooses to focus on the intrapsychic, the consciousness and insight of the characters, and the interpersonal dynamics between them. The assumption that one should be in a relationship that facilitates self-actualization, the emphasis on introspection and communication, were birthed with the baby boomers in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. The Prince’s journey in particular can be viewed as an example of the "mythopoetic" experiences of the men's movement in the 1970s and 80s.

Another contemporary cultural element in Coover’s hypertext is the unashamed description of emotional and sexual desire. By comparison the Grimm brothers and Perrault versions of the tale are sterile. There are all manner of body parts and sexual acts described in the vehicle of the story-fantasy-dream-memory in salacious detail, including incest and bestiality. While sexual desire has long been found in literature, explicit references to sexual acts and to the impact of them on the doer and recipient have been more common since the free love movement

of the 60's and the awareness of sexual abuse resulting from the child abuse legislation of the early 1970's.

A political theme in Coover's text is the changing expectations of gender roles. The Grimm brothers and Perrault portray defined gender roles quite clearly. He is the rescuer and she, the rescued. The Prince and Princess in Coover's tale exhibit that reciprocity, that fluid complementarity that we have come to expect in relationships since the advent of the feminist movement. The Princess vacillates between her passivity and aggression, helplessness and control. The Prince is at times the savior and at times, the lacerated victim, once even asking the Princess for help. Their struggles within themselves and with their perceptions of each other are refreshingly honest and real until they settle into a miserable homeostasis. Unfortunately, Coover's prescription for this is an old remedy, an affair with a younger woman. Not to be accused of being sexist, however, he has the Queen continue to seek out lovers as well.

"The Briar Rose" as a Hypertext.

The structure of the text in *The Briar Rose* is hypertextual. There are forty-two independent lexias. Many of the elements are a continuation of elements introduced in *Little Briar-Rose* and in *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*. The order of events is not linear or chronological but multisequential, "a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variation" (Barthes 2). In fact, it is often difficult to tell past from present and present from future, even within the same lexia. The "narrative time line vanishes into a geographical landscape or exitless maze" (Coover, "The End of Books" 49) with no beginning, middle, end but options to choose multiple, often repetitive paths from the home page or to suggest pages within each lexia. This is particularly valuable in *The Briar Rose* as the movement between the points of view of the prince and princess gift us with insight into their perceptions and the meaning they will assign to their experiences and the impact they will have on each other.

The text is linked electronically to hypermedia – images and musical phrases, sometimes with lyrics, sometimes not. Hypertext allows the creation of perception of interconnections (Morgan , cited in Landow 55) and permits one to make these explicit (Landow 55). Scholes offers readers the opportunity to post comments or write responsive lexias, making this text what Barthe would describe as a writerly text – a text where the “reader is no longer a consumer, but a producer and co-author of the text (qtd. in Landow 4).

Mikhail Bakhtin describes the hypertext as “dialogic, polyphonic, multivocal” (cited in Landow 56) and Landow describes it as the “. . . the interaction of several consciousnesses” (56). Coover’s text is clearly an example of the voices of the multiple parts of each character engaging in dialogue with themselves and with the imagined selves of other characters.

Role of the Visual and Audio Elements by Scholes

Some of Scholes links to hypermedia do little to improve Coover’s text. They seem trivial, almost as if he is free associating.

Some introduce comic relief into what is becoming a debilitating and exhausting journey for the reader. In one scene the Princess avoids another fairy story by retreating into a dream of lesser trauma, a dream about being awakened by a prince who sinks his teeth into her throat (29). The hypertext links here are to a cartoon of a hound dog and Elvis Presley serenading us with “you ain’t nothing but a hound dog “

In another scene, Rose is being aroused by a monkey who fondles and paws her while “her parents and others laugh uproariously” (25). The hyperlink is to a songbook entitled “Pricksongs & Descants.”

Some links are used to foreshadow events or concepts. For example, Rose is drawn to “a loving old crone . . . vaguely threatening, yet dearer to her in her dreams than any other” (4). There is a hypertext invitation in song to “pack up your sorrow, and give them all to me” paired

with a depiction of the old crone. There is some promise that the crone will help her. In another lexia, Scholes illustrates this union of good and bad in each of us by linking to a picture of a crone who is singing “somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue”

Another example of the use of hypertext to foreshadow occurs when the Prince begins to question, “is she truly the beautiful object of pure love she is alleged to be, or is she the wicked fairy’s wicked creature, more captor than captive, more briar than blossom, such that waking her might have proven a worse fate than the one that is seemingly his”(16). The picture of Marlene Dietrich, hooded, eyes closed with cigarette hanging from her lips demonstrates how his image of her is changing in his mind.

A third example occurs when the hedge is “resisting his every movement . . . closing in behind and above him as he advances” (12). He wonders if he is on the right path. He begins to doubt his chosenness –“Perhaps I am not the one.” (12). This love is turning out to be fearsome, daunting, painful, and sacrificial. The lyrics of the song in the hypertext introduce the possibility of his being caught up in a spell of black magic that is intentionally woven.

A final example occurs when the Prince slips back in the briars’ embrace.” (28) The hypertext here is a picture of a thorn bush that upon close examination is composed of bodies in various position of embrace. The warning here is clear: Embracing = more thorns.

Some juxtapose images or music that is in direct contraction to the verbal text. In some cases this underscores the denial of a particular character. For example, the Prince seeks to provoke a confrontation with “enchantment itself” . . . to “make his name.” (1) He is aware what it has already cost his predecessors. He sees their bones and smells the decay. Yet he believes he may have been chosen. The triumphant Star Wars theme plays behind the image of their tangled bodies on the ground.

In another scene Rose has “been visited by her own father, couched speculatively between her thighs, . . . as, with velvety thrusts, he searches out the spindle.” (7) The hypertext link here is appropriately a picture of a wolf in the bed with her, accompanied by the lyrics to “I’ve got you under my skin . . . deep in the heart of me . . . so deep in my heart that you’re really a part of me.” The lighthearted nature of the lyrics is strangely unsettling paired with this scene of violation and incest.

In another scene the fairy is relating the story of Beauty whose prince was married to a wife who had Beauty killed, roasted over a fire, and served to the prince who ate her for dinner. The wife then adopted Beauty’s children (25). The hypermedia link here reveals a picture of Jack Nicholas with a frighteningly maniacal grin set to a female voice singing, “someone who’ll watch over me.”

When he announces his intention to leave he is met with her fury and swooning and then is pressured by all present to take her to her bedchamber. He capitulates yet again (38). The hypertext links to a picture of the Beast, holding her by her partial skeleton as she appears to be choking. The background music is “I know you, I walked wit you once upon a dream” The juxtaposition illustrates their tenuous balance between illusion and rage.

Other of Scholes’ choices of hypermedia are important in their punctuation of important events, serving to deepen the impact of them. For example, when the old crone tells Rose that the Prince has died in the barren landscape, Rose argues, “You can’t do that. That’s not how stories are.” Yet the music in the hypertext tells her that she must walk this lonesome valley by herself. (32)

Fed by a diet of stories from the wicked/good fairy, she creates barriers, alternative thorn hedges, with her imaginings that are “just behind her left ear” (31). Scholes hypertext links to an advertisement that summons her – “Now is the time to remove the barriers preventing you from

enjoying the intimacy, the companionship, and the security of a fulfilling relationship.” But the music suggests that the “old black magic has [her] in its spell.”

An especially poignant use of hypertext is that paired with the scene where the Prince “consoles himself with thought of what might have been” (24). He accepts the fact that he has been in denial, “blind eye cast toward the abyss”, and resigns himself to strive for the “love of love.” (24) The hypertext link to a country music phrase plaintively underscores his need for understanding – “I’ve been having some hard traveling I thought you knowed . . . “

In lexia 37 she claws him, enraged but, he answers her with this – “I feel the reason I never escaped the briars was that, in the end, I loved them, or at least I needed them. . . . They grew on me.” (37) The picture of Hannibal Lecter with the music I’ve got you under my skin, . . . you’re really a part of me” dramatically illustrates their complicity in this arrangement.

A particularly dramatic use of hypermedia is in Lexia 38. By now the King, he is trapped, himself victimized, not rewarded for his pain and suffering in rescuing her. When he announces his intention to leave he is met with her fury and swooning and then is pressured by all present to take her to her bedchamber. He capitulates yet again. The hypertext links to a picture of the Beast (of *Beauty and the Beast*), choking the partial remains of her skeleton. The background music is “I know you, I walked with you once upon a dream . . . “ The juxtaposition illustrates their tenuous balance between illusion and rage.

Finally, Scholes deepens the sadness and despair Coover has penned in Lexia 40. Rose endures “sequential disenchantments . . . the very essence of her being” (40). Coover indicates that the fairy’s spell binds her to this, that she can never be other than this (40). The hypertext links are to yet another portrait of a Princess in repose, a Prince standing over, and the sound of a trumpet heralding yet another beginning that slowly fades away.

Conclusion

Language acts as a store of perception and as a transmitter of the perceptions and experience of one person or one generation to another (McLuhan 151-152) What Coover enables for the reader in this hypertext is the affective experience of the Prince and Princess as they each cope with their own conflicting memories, stories, fantasies, dreams, fears, musings, and emotions -- both individually and in their imagined or felt responses to each other. What Coover disables for the reader in the hypertext is the experience of clarity and closure, unless he chooses that ending for himself. Perhaps that is the point.

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. 1971. *From Work to Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. 1977. 06 September 2007.
<<http://homepage.newschool.edu/~quigleyt/vcs/barthes-wt.html>>.

Chandler, Daniel. *Semiotics for Beginners*. 1994. 06 September 2007.
<<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/>>

Coover, Robert. *The Briar Rose*. 1st ed. New York: Grove Press. 1996.

--- "The End of Books." *The New Media Reader*. Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003. 705-709.

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. "Little Briar-Rose." 1812. *Sleeping Beauty*. Trans./Ed. D.L. Ashliman. 1998-2005. 06 September 2007.
<http://blackboard.vcu.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=45804_1>

Jung, Carl G. *Alchemical Studies*. Vol. 15. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967.
Landow, George P. *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

Perrault, Charles. "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." (ca. 1889). *The Blue Fairy Book*. Ed. Andrew Lang. London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1907. 54-63.

Scholes, Robert. *The Hypertext Version of Briar Rose*. 2003. 06 September 2007.
<<http://www.brown.edu/Departments/MCM/people/scholes/BriarRose/texts/BRhome.htm>>