

Renee St. Louis and Miriam Riggs

**“A Painful, Bleeding Sleep”:
Sleeping Beauty in the Dollhouse**

“She dreams, as she has often dreamt, of abandonment and betrayal, of lost hope, of the self gone astray from the body, the body forsaking the unlikely self.... Her longing for integrity is, in her spellbound innocence, all she knows of rage and lust, but this longing is itself fragmented and wayward.... What, if anything, can make her whole again? And what is ‘whole’?”

Robert Coover, *Briar Rose*, 2-3

[1] Even a casual observer might note that *Dollhouse* makes frequent reference to fairy tales in both subtle and overt ways. Less obvious, however, is the importance of examining these references not merely as elements of storytelling already familiar to the audience—a kind of narrative shorthand—but as a means of accessing fairy tale as a mode of storytelling for the show itself. Because the show deals so extensively with the meanings and psychological implications of sleep and waking, perhaps it should come as no surprise that the fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty figures extensively in *Dollhouse*’s adoption (and revision) of fairy tale thematic content. Even when not overtly referencing the fairy tale, the show shares much of the internal logic common to fairy tales, particularly concerning the nature of consciousness, the use and value of intellect and action, and the development of morality. Taken together, these related concerns address, for *Dollhouse* and for fairy tales more generally, the ways in which individuals achieve a sort of psychological wholeness. Applied further, if *Dollhouse* employs fairy tale tropes and storytelling conventions (while at the same time reinventing and critiquing them), it is still in the service of both

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entertaining an audience and instructing individuals in the ways they should approach narrative television.

[2] In order to appreciate the multivalent storytelling uses of fairy tale and their complication of and commentary upon the themes of sleep, consciousness, and morality in *Dollhouse*, one must first examine fairy tale as a whole for its relationship to these topics. Although fairy tales extend back through human history at least to the time of Plato and likely far earlier (Franz 3-4), organized efforts to collect them don't start until the seventeenth century, and scholarly interest came later still. Even so, in the few hundred years that people have attempted to make sense of the apparently universal urge to craft fairy tales for the entertainment and education of children and adults, several theories as to their meaning have emerged. What, then, is agreed upon about fairy tale—and how does it shape a reading of *Dollhouse*?

[3] Most scholarly treatments of fairy tale use the ubiquity of fairy tales, and the commonality of their tropes, as evidence that the stories themselves originate in some element of human consciousness. Philosopher Rudolph Steiner claimed that “the starting point of all true [fairy] tales lies in time immemorial, in the time when those who had not yet attained intellectual powers possessed a more or less remarkable clairvoyance... People who had preserved this lived in a condition between sleeping and waking where they actually experienced the spiritual world in many different forms” (par. 11). In this view, fairy tales themselves are evidence of the twilight of human consciousness to be found between the states of sleep and wakefulness. While other scholars have since complicated this formulation, which posits fairy tales as elements of a spiritual truth held over from a time before thought and between states of consciousness, later psychology agrees to remarkable extent. More recent psychologists even agree with Steiner's suggestion that fairy tales help to reconcile a divide between what we might term the three parts of consciousness; where Steiner posits three souls, later scholarship examines elements of consciousness: sentience (for our purposes, self-awareness), intelligence, and morality.

[4] Using Jungian psychology as her framework of interpretation, Mary-Louise von Franz opens her well-regarded 1970s work *The*

Interpretation of Fairy Tales with the claim that “[f]airy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes” (1). She goes on to explain that “all fairy tales endeavor to describe one and the same psychic fact, but a fact so complex and far-reaching and so difficult for us to realize in all its different aspects that hundreds of tales and thousands of repetitions...are needed until this unknown fact is delivered into consciousness; and even then the theme is not exhausted. This unknown fact is what Jung calls the Self, which is the psychic totality of an individual and also, paradoxically, the regulating center of the collective unconscious” (2). In Jungian terms, fairy tales allow the individuation process, reconciling conflicts between the animus (male), anima (female), and shadow (amoral) selves by playing out these tensions in archetypal forms and venting or even resolving them through the universal language of the collective unconscious.

[5] Psychoanalytic theory influenced by Freud follows a similar line of reasoning about the indispensability of fairy tales to the individual and their importance in the formation of consciousness. Bruno Bettelheim cogently expresses this psychoanalytic model when he posits that “[a]pplying the psychoanalytic model of the human personality, fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time... As the stories unfold, they give conscious credence and body to id pressures and show ways to satisfy these that are in line with ego and superego requirements” (6). In this theory, fairy tales help to shape consciousness by communicating between the various levels of the mind, resolving conflicts and allaying tensions. The implications for moral enrichment are recognized implicitly here, in the satisfaction of the superego, though other scholars make the recognition of this morality-instruction more overt, as when Sheldon Cashdan asserts that “[f]airy tales may be enchanted adventures, but they also deal with a universal struggle—the battle between good and bad forces in the self” (26). Cashdan’s work also recognizes the utility of fairy tales as moral instruction for both children and adults. Even in this more pragmatic theory, fairy tales give vent to the tensions in human relationships—those of adults as much as those of children—and provide a framework for dealing with difficult relationships and other realities of life by encouraging us to confront the

problematic aspects of our own natures before they poison our relationships and desire for meaning (252).

[6] What all of this means for an analysis of *Dollhouse* is that it should be read not just as a story which makes use of fairy tale or borrows its imagery, but that due to its concerns with the articulation of a coherent self and the construction of consciousness, it is a story ideally suited to expression in fairy tale form. In fact, it does not go too far to suggest that *Dollhouse*, taken as a whole, becomes a kind of fairy tale, offering both a conventionally satisfying narrative most closely paralleling the widely-known fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty (or Briar Rose) and a critical revision of some of its traditional lessons. Like the dollhouse within *Dollhouse*, it deals in fantasy, but that is not its purpose ("A Spy in the House of Love" 1.9). While the primary theoretical discussions of fairy tales disagree as to the naming and framing of the categories, all seem to agree that fairy tales work in part for individuals to express and resolve internal conflicts; to develop self-awareness, intelligence, and morality or conscience (a three-part consciousness); and to understand on an intuitive level the tensions at play in the world around us. *Dollhouse* both depicts and deconstructs fairy tales, allowing the show to perform many of these same functions performed by them. Where fairy tales most often target the developing consciousness of children with socially-accepted messages (Bettelheim 5, Franz 3), *Dollhouse* adapts the themes, framework and purpose of fairy tales to the evolving consciousness of its largely adult audience.

[7] *Dollhouse* therefore uses allusions to specific fairy tales as well as several tropes common to fairy tales in general to establish some of its main thematic concerns. In the aired pilot, a client compares Echo to Cinderella ("Ghost" 1.1). Other references include Hansel and Gretel ("The Target" 1.2), Little Red Riding Hood (ibid and Commentary for "Man on the Street" 1.6), and Alice in Wonderland ("Echoes" 1.7). By making direct mention of these stories, and by borrowing their plot elements in some cases, the writers of *Dollhouse* access the shared knowledge of the audience—about the difference between appearance and reality, the tension between good and evil, and even the nature of curiosity and the learning process. At the same time, this allows the show to comment on its *own* status as a fantasy

narrative and to participate in the reconstruction and reframing of fairy tales for story-telling and instructional purposes.

[8] By having characters (particularly F.B.I. Agent Paul Ballard's skeptical colleagues) refer to the Dollhouse as a fairy tale or an urban myth, the writers remind the audience of the fantastic premise of the show—the manipulation of consciousness and the creation of doll personas to give clients their deepest desires ("Ghost"). Other fairy tale references in the show point out the potential connections between sleeping, waking, and consciousness development. Near the end of Season One, Echo—uploaded with an old persona—wakes from the Dollhouse chair and calls Alpha her prince ("Briar Rose" 1.11). Alpha takes her to his lair, where he presents her with his own version of the imprinting chair, saying, "Welcome to your castle, my princess. Behold your throne" ("Omega" 1.12). The use of fairy tale rhetoric in these episodes, ones that mark a dramatic shift in Echo's ability to forge a coherent, active self from the fragments of her many previous personas, is particularly salient given that scholarly work on fairy tales stresses these stories' ability to aid precisely in that process (see above, par. 3-7).

[9] The motif of the rescuing white knight also plays out over a number of episodes, asking the audience to accept both the standard fairy tale version, in which the knight rescues the princess, and alternative interpretations, in which other characters from the tale are not as passive as they might seem. Joel Mynor, the software designer who uses Echo to resurrect his wife, taunts Paul Ballard by recasting his operation as an elaborate fairy tale with a happy ending. He describes Ballard's pursuit of Caroline as a knight on a quest, which will end when he rescues her, they fall in love, and presumably live happily ever after ("Man on the Street"). Ballard is further portrayed as the knight of a fairy tale, particularly when he "saves" Caroline by catching the wedge that holds her original personality ("Omega"). And Ballard is not the only white knight—Senator Daniel Perrin leads a crusade to expose Rossum's illegal Dollhouse operation. His revelation as a doll complicates his relationship to the fairy tale role of the brave knight, however; his call and response prompt with his wife is in fact a script meant to bind doll to handler:

Cindy Perrin: "Remind me why I love you so much."

Daniel Perrin: "I'm your white knight."

Cindy: "And I'm your beautiful damsel."

Daniel: "Ever after." ("The Public Eye" 2.5)

The writers of *Dollhouse* rely on the shared notion of the white knight and his chivalry, but they also challenge this standard and suggest its dangers (to turn into obsession in the case of Ballard, addressed further below) and its traditional limitations (in romanticizing gender relations).

[10] *Dollhouse* also makes implicit use of fairy tale conventions in its treatments of power within a structured set of relationships, such as those of the family or of the authoritarian Rossum Corporation. Among the main characters of the show, none is ever shown as having even a single living family member. The only family member ever introduced is Madeline/November's dead daughter, referenced as an explanation for Madeline's flight into doll life; a closer look raises questions about where the other people in her life were during this crisis, and why she isn't missed when she disappears after losing a child ("Needs" 1.8). While even this might not at first seem strange, it bears noting that the entire premise of the show relies upon Rossum having access to dozens—if not hundreds—of aesthetically and biologically desirable people who will not be missed if they should disappear without contact for five years. Obviously, these are people with few ties to the world and none solid enough to situate them in a network of human relations. This suggests that the people within the Dollhouses are not just colleagues and/or unconscious beauties, but also a substitute for family, as noted when Topher mentions Boyd's history of sleeping at the L.A. Dollhouse ("The Attic" 2.10) and further emphasized in light of the fact that Topher also lives full-time at the house ("Vows" 2.1). So, like the dolls, even the handlers, security staff and technicians live at the Dollhouse.

[11] The Dollhouse is thus *home*, making the people in its walls family, and situating Adelle DeWitt as the female figure of power in the family element of the tale, likening her to a mother (always a complicated figure in fairy tales, made up of equal and opposite good mothers and bad

stepmothers or witches), a queen, or both. DeWitt's own words and actions render her difficult to locate between the poles of the good mother and the bad, the wise and beautiful queen or the betraying and power-mongering one. Further, her relationship to the physical space of the home, the L.A. Dollhouse, is an ambiguous and sometimes contradictory one. Although her covert off-site meetings with Victor seem to imply that she has a private home away from the Dollhouse, we see it in no other context, opening the possibility that it may merely be a safe house she uses for assassinations ("A Spy in the House of Love"). However, she is shown at the Dollhouse at all hours of day and night, and on several occasions is seemingly too intoxicated to consider leaving, even if she does have somewhere to go (such as in "Stop-Loss" 2.9). Finally, it is worth noting that in her capacities as both queen and as mother, her duties relate primarily to the preservation of the house and home—whether by protecting her Dollhouse from espionage (as in "A Spy in the House of Love"), attempting to prevent and punish abuses of the Actives (as in "Belonging" 2.4) or, most tellingly, by both finding and creating Safe Haven ("Epitaph Two: Return" 2.13). That the queen and mother is perhaps the toughest of all the characters to understand or predict is entirely in keeping with fairy tales, in which the maternal figures have a huge amount of power, and are frequently split into positive figures—such as the good mother, the fairy godmother, or the beautiful queen—and negative types like the evil witch or the wicked stepmother (see Cashdan 27-29).

[12] The references to *Sleeping Beauty* in particular make it the most appropriate fairy tale to use as a lens for examining some of the major themes of *Dollhouse*. First, the Actives experience (or are told they experience) their engagements as a kind of sleep, which is explicitly expressed in the lock and key prompt after they are wiped: "Did I fall asleep?" "For a little while" ("Ghost"). And, as acknowledged several times in the show, the Actives/dolls are "stone-cold foxes in small clothes" ("Briar Rose"). This constructs them all as sleeping beauties, but the series goes further in making explicit connections to *Sleeping Beauty* as its primary fairy tale. As Joel Mynor discusses Caroline with Ballard, he says that Ballard can "feel Caroline beckoning" and asks if he has imagined the scene when he finally rescues her and restores her personality ("Man on the Street"). This connects Ballard to the prince of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale, the one who feels

drawn to rescue the princess, the one who will wake her with a kiss. Ballard likewise gets frequent warnings to drop his investigation into the Dollhouse (from his supervisors and fellow F.B.I. agents, from Victor/Anton Lubov, from Mynor), which relates to the villagers in the fairy tale telling the prince to give up his quest for the princess, despite the fact that he feels compelled to rescue her.

[13] Even more explicitly, the episode "Briar Rose" takes its name and thematic content from *Sleeping Beauty*, perhaps most overtly Robert Coover's update of the classic tale, itself titled *Briar Rose*. As the opening quotation to this essay demonstrates, Coover's tale reexamines the presumed passivity of the sleeping princess, framing sleep as an A/active effort to integrate the conflicting fragments of self and achieve a conscious "whole." Similarly, *Dollhouse* depicts the evolution and development of self in states of manipulated or limited consciousness. Even when they are forced asleep—as by Topher's stun gun—it is acknowledged as a "painful, bleeding sleep," a trial to endure far more than a passive, inactive state ("The Left Hand" 2.6). Within the plot of the episode "Briar Rose," Echo's engagement takes her to a group foster home, where she reads a version of *Sleeping Beauty* to the children living there, ending with the prince's kiss that awakens the princess and restores the kingdom. Two scene changes from this episode demonstrate the direct relationship established between this fairy tale and the world of the Dollhouse, with repercussions for the entire series. First, a torn-out page from the book showing the prince cuts to a shot of Paul Ballard, trying to figure out how to access the underground Dollhouse. Second, as he follows Mellie's van back to the Dollhouse, a shot fades from the corner of the building (complete with barbed wire and video camera) to the drawing of Briar Rose's castle and surrounding thorns ("Briar Rose"). Ballard thus becomes the prince, and the dolls, particularly Caroline/Echo and Madeline/Mellie/November, become the sleeping beauties to be rescued.

[14] This formulation is immediately complicated by the ways in which other concerns of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale factor into the narrative of *Dollhouse*. Caroline, the sleeping (and waking) beauty at the center of the story, comes into doll life by entering a forbidden space. In most versions of the fairy tale, the sleeping beauty explores a closed tower of her castle, is

pricked by the enchanted spindle, and thus is taken from painful encounter into the trap of slumber. Something similar is shown to have happened to Echo at least twice—the invasion of a Rossum lab that culminated in the death of her boyfriend and the incursion that ended with Bennett’s dead arm (“Ghost” and “The Left Hand”). Her sleep, her mind wipe (shown as terrifically painful to other inductees, such as Priya), and status as an Active result from this entrance into a forbidden space, much as other Sleeping Beauties. It is worth noting that former FBI Agent Paul Ballard also enters the taboo Los Angeles Dollhouse, a space forbidden to him both by its covert nature and by his failure to acquire a legal warrant. In this fantasy system in which passivity and activity overlap and even merge, the prince also becomes the princess—the rescuer in need of rescue. That Ballard eventually becomes not only a handler but a doll reveals just how easily roles slip and violate conventions of traditional narrative resolution, pointing to the ways in which the show both adopts and critiques these conventions.

[15] The show also emphasizes the dangers and difficulties of independence, particularly for those deemed vulnerable; in the case of *Dollhouse*, the Actives themselves are the vulnerable, suggestible children, linking all the Actives to Sleeping Beauty and her peril. The linking of pain and awareness, as when Echo explains that pain lets her know she’s awake (“Instinct” 2.2), refers back to the fairy tale in a way best expressed by Robert Coover’s reimagining of the story: “There is this to be said for the stabbing pain of the spindle prick. It anchors her, locates a self when all else in sleep unbinds and scatters it” (5). The show also seems to link pain and choice in a way which both echoes and reframes the fairy tale. Where the sleeping beauty makes an unauthorized choice which results in tragic imprisonment only another can redeem, in *Dollhouse* the same pain and tragic imprisonment are redeemed by extraordinary efforts on the part of the individuals themselves—even when outside assistance contributes. The relationship between choice and the acceptance of consequences, a key lesson of most versions of Sleeping Beauty, appears as a lesson in the *Dollhouse* tale from the opening scene of the aired pilot, in which Adelle explains to Caroline her responsibility for her own predicament (“Ghost”).

[16] Once they arrive in the Dollhouse, Actives face a series of manipulations, complicated by the fact that the doll state an Active enters

when between engagements is a highly suggestible one. The dolls respond to very simple prompts, as in the use of the “Did I fall asleep?” scripts for coming out of the chair (first used in “Ghost,” and persistent throughout the series). Ironically, the Actives are conditioned to ask about their state of consciousness, and they are supplied with an answer that is both a truth and a lie—they *have* in fact entered a kind of sleep, but coming out of the chair doesn’t end it. This sleep is not over and, at least in most cases, did not last just “for a little while,” which points to the reality that this walking dream state is one in which the ability of the dolls to perceive reality is deeply compromised. Further, some use the suggestible state of dolls between engagements for nefarious purposes, as when Sierra’s handler Hearn uses her suggestibility to recast his rapes of her as a “game” in which she must participate silently, as “noise is upsetting” (“Man on the Street”). The childlike eagerness of the dolls to please is also signaled here, as despite the indelible nature of Sierra’s trauma at Hearn’s hands, she still follows his suggestions. Her conflict on this front is pushed to a deeper level yet, one that can surface only in the form of traumatic response.¹

[17] This idea of sleep as a challenge or test to be faced on the way to change and consciousness again links the tale of the *Dollhouse* to that of the Sleeping Beauty. In addition to the Attic’s gauntlet of personal fears and adrenaline-induced panic, sleep is used as part of another key test in the show, a test of Echo’s evolving consciousness. In the world of Sleeping Beauty, sleep is always a test to some extent—whether it be a test of the princes to see which will be the one to rescue the princess from her enchanted slumber, as in the Grimm version, or a test of the princess to see whether she can retain a sense of self and dream up a solution to her predicament, as in Coover. This second possibility seems to be the one preferred by the show, as shown when Echo explains to the child Susan how she should read Sleeping Beauty:

Remember what you said—the prince shows up at the last minute, takes all the credit. That means Briar Rose was trapped all that time, sleeping, and dreaming of getting out. The prince was her dream. She made him. She made him fight to get her out. (“Briar Rose”)

In the world of *Dollhouse*, then, sleep is a trap, but not one in which people are completely helpless. Even at their most compromised, those asleep participate in their world and take part in their own salvation. This first season episode thus points to some of the ways that sleep figures into the growth of self-awareness, learning, and consciousness while also subtly revising and critiquing conventional readings of Sleeping Beauty tales which locate agency and awareness exclusively in the figure of the rescuing prince or white knight.

[18] Having established that *Dollhouse* borrows, manipulates, and critiques various tropes common in fairy tales, we turn our attention now to the ways in which the show similarly treats the underlying subject matter and psychological processes of fairy tale. In particular, we concern ourselves with the show's fairy-tale-like representations of the development of a three-part consciousness (self-awareness, intelligence, and morality), which allows individuals to reach psychological wholeness and true maturity. By examining the story arcs of several key characters, it becomes clear that *Dollhouse* employs fairy tale tropes and develops this three-part consciousness to demonstrate the integrative process by which individuals come to perceive themselves and their place in society, resolving conflicts and allaying tensions along the way—this is the “longing for integrity” that Coover describes in the epigraph for this essay. At the same time, the fairy tale “message” of the show suggests that once someone has achieved this psychological wholeness, he or she is then meaningfully prepared to accept societal roles, values, and consequences. Further, the psychologically whole individual may even potentially challenge those societal elements on the basis of individual, mature decision-making. Fundamentally, the show, like fairy tales more generally, develops the twin concerns of choice and consequences to demonstrate some of the problems with an incompletely developed consciousness and, more importantly, how the self-aware, intelligent, and moral person can and should use a fully-developed consciousness to make informed decisions.

[19] The doll state and the recognition of incomplete consciousness within the show points out the importance of feelings, memories, and self-awareness in the actual construction of a fully integrated consciousness. Importantly, the dolls able to recognize their status as dolls have the most

chances to make decisions for themselves, although these choices are still often very limited. Senator Daniel Perrin remembers that his wife is his handler and later kills her in his sleeper state. Presumably, he chooses to be wiped and re-imprinted rather than deal with the consequences of having been made a doll in the first place. Interestingly enough, this choice seems to be in line with his underlying, pre-doll moral character as an unambitious, "spoiled, pampered, selfish child" trading on his family's wealth, privilege, and influence ("The Left Hand"). In contrast, Mellie unselfishly chooses suicide over obeying her sleeper programming to kill Ballard in the Rossum Corporation headquarters in Tucson ("The Hollow Man" 2.12).

[20] Alpha and Echo, given their ability to manage multiple imprints at the same time, have more possible choices. The "composite event" for each of them, in which all their personalities are uploaded at once, forces them to confront their doll status and causes a reorganization and ongoing evolution of their minds, personalities, and worldviews ("Omega"). In Alpha's case, his destructive tendencies and his obsession with Echo first lead him to maim and kill, but he does continue to grow and change, turning the old L.A. Dollhouse into a safe haven and making it possible for Echo and Ballard ultimately to come together in Echo's mind ("The Target," "Omega," and "Epitaph Two: Return"). In Echo's case, her composite event shows her the difference between herself, her other imprints, and Caroline. From this point, she begins to understand how to access the knowledge of her various imprints, to help herself, to help others, and to continue Caroline's (and her own) work of attempting to bring down the Rossum Corporation ("Omega," "Meet Jane Doe" 2.7, and "Epitaph Two: Return"). Ultimately, Ballard expresses the most interesting opinion on the awareness of his doll status. As initially one of the most critical opponents of the Dollhouse and the brainwashing of the dolls, he comes to terms with his status as a doll (an imprint of himself), saying, "I decided it doesn't matter anymore. We feel what we feel" ("The Hollow Man"). He also overcomes his Active architecture in part by re-learning to love Echo, the neural pathways Topher had taken away from him in order to restore his brain functions ("Epitaph Two: Return"). Thus, *Dollhouse*, again sharing the logic of fairy tales, posits self-awareness as one element used in the process of making choices and

therefore of accepting consequences, critical steps in maturation and development.

[21] The next component of consciousness, intellectual ability, is shown in *Dollhouse* to have a complex relationship to psychological wholeness, as evidenced in the portrayal of intellectually gifted characters shown as incompletely developed people. For the show's characters, intellect, while useful and necessary to develop a fully human and evolving consciousness, can be as much of a burden and impediment as a boon. For Whiskey and Boyd, intellect exists alongside self-awareness and successfully evokes elements of moral consciousness. These characters, however, do not act in concert with their moral awareness, and the resulting cognitive dissonance works to their detriment (though it may help to explain their affinity for one another). In the cases of Dominic and Adelle, intellect acts to prevent moral conscience by providing a seemingly endless source of justifications for their actions. Dominic, the first security head of the Los Angeles Dollhouse, is ultimately revealed to be a double agent, employed by the National Security Agency to infiltrate Rossum's Dollhouse scheme and insure that the technology doesn't escape their control. His complicity in the atrocities of Rossum is explained away as in service of the greater good, a too-easy rationalization that allows the character to behave badly, something he confronts when under mind-altering drug influence in "Echoes."

[22] Taking this even further, Adelle DeWitt is more than complicit in the machinations of the corporation—she is the agent responsible for putting the public relations spin on their actions, as she does from her very first moments on screen in the aired pilot "Ghost." As late as the middle of the second season, she is still shown using her strategist's mind to create rationalizations for the actions of Rossum, Topher, and herself, as well as using her considerable intellectual gifts to manipulate the thoughts and actions of others to suit her agenda and Rossum's dictates, perhaps because she believes in their work ("Echoes"). This is never more apparent than when, entrusted by Topher with knowledge of the horribly destructive technology he has crafted, she gives it to Rossum higher-up Harding, putting the blame for any consequences back on Topher by saying to him, "You were fascinated. You were playing," as though his amorality somehow excuses or overshadows her own ("Meet Jane Doe"). Ultimately, the character does join

the ranks of the heroic, largely by resolving the ambivalent tendencies which continually marked her character as self-serving and amoral. By covertly sending Echo into the Attic to find information which might help to thwart Rossum's apocalyptic mission ("Getting Closer" 2.11, and "The Attic"), Adelle finally takes a side in what has become a war between factions. Interestingly, her resolution and moral awakening are signaled by the private act of abstaining from alcohol, turning back the tide of several previous episodes in which both her drinking and her moral ambiguity escalate—as by sending Priya back to her tormentor Nolan after having tried to prevent it ("Belonging"). This is entirely in keeping with a fairy tale narrative, in which alcohol might be depicted as a poison preventing the potentially good queen/mother from fulfilling her moral role as head of household. Adelle seems to leave her problem drinking behind and embrace a less comfortable but more moral life simultaneously.

[23] Topher as a character further illustrates this danger of the gifted intellect devoid of moral conscience. His incompletely formed humanity bears the blame for his most serious faults of character—whether it be referring to the unimprinted dolls as "a little bit bison" ("Gray Hour" 1.4) rather than acknowledge their humanity or creating potentially apocalyptic technology to satisfy his own curiosity ("Meet Jane Doe"). That the show depicts Topher as a child should come as no surprise given that his character evidences particular intellect and an almost complete lack of moral framework—one of the principle requirements of adulthood. In fact, Adelle informs Topher that his childlike amorality was part of the reason he was chosen to work in the Dollhouse, this in response to his disapproval of sending Sierra/Priya to live permanently with Nolan ("Belonging"). After Priya kills Nolan and Boyd makes him dismember the body, Topher decides to let "mommy and daddy" handle any further moral quandaries for him ("The Left Hand"). While he recognizes here that "adult" moral choices are complex and often difficult to make, his abdication of responsibility to make those decisions for himself signifies his child status and incomplete moral development within the show.

[24] Topher's character arc ends, however, with his acceptance of moral responsibility. By "Epitaph One," the guilt from having invented "the tech that punk-kicked the ass of mankind" has driven him crazy. He has created a living space in one of the old sleep pods; books and artifacts

surround his nest in what seems to be an effort to bring himself some comfort (1.13). Topher returns to the Dollhouse in "Epitaph Two" to retrieve something he needs to complete the new technology to restore the world's original personalities. As he jumps into his old bed (with childlike zest), he wraps himself in an old blankie and pats a statue, saying, "Kill your idols. There's a piece of truth" (2.13). Topher has returned to his place of childlike curiosity for an idea, his earlier playfulness character trait now in the service of a project to help millions of people. This scene, as well as his choice to be the one to activate the technology and die in the process, demonstrates his moral completeness in his desire and willingness to help others and to make amends for his previous negative actions. Topher, interestingly enough the man/child originally at play in the Dollhouse, internalizes the fairy tale lessons and becomes an example of an individual choosing action and consequence as result of psychological and moral wholeness.

[25] If Topher's character achieves wholeness by developing a moral center to guide the use of his intellect, several of the dolls achieve wholeness by bringing together fragments of all three necessary elements for psychological coherence—self-consciousness, intellect, and morality. In the case of Alpha, full awareness of all of his imprints does not imbue him with full consciousness, because it doesn't imbue him with a moral code. This is signaled when Alpha announces that although all of him recognizes the immorality of his intent to kill one of Echo's clients, he not only doesn't care but in fact finds it funny—or at least some of him does ("Omega"). It is only after the introduction of Ballard's "wedge" into his cluster of personas that Alpha begins to resolve his internal conflicts, for example directing his obsession for Echo into more productive channels. By the finale, Alpha has turned the former L.A. Dollhouse into a safe haven and puts his substantial intellectual and technological resources to work for the group attempting to restore the world's original personalities. He likewise makes it possible for Echo and Ballard (killed earlier in the episode) to reunite in Echo's consciousness, symbolically relinquishing his pursuit of her affections by giving her Ballard's wedge to add to her imprints ("Epitaph Two: Return"). Echo, on the other hand, comes through her forced composite event with a clear morality and an integrated sense of self ("Omega"). While the show

leaves the explanation for their different paths to moral awakening and full (heroic) consciousness, it is interesting to note that Echo, previously an “idealist” (“Getting Closer”) named Caroline, seems to retain a level of moral awareness and responsibility when submerged into an Active. Alpha, previously a felon responsible for slashing the faces of his victims, seemingly retains a violent, misogynistic and obsessive streak that undermines the potential for chosen moral action. These character arcs, which make use of a similar logic as fairy tales, suggest that even as dolls or Actives—even when asleep—intelligent and aware people retain elements of their basic character or conscience and have to resolve their internal conflicts in order to evolve as integrated people.

[26] Moving to the instructional elements of the *Dollhouse* fairytale, a combination of child-like and adult qualities, the show suggests, offers the best chance for minds to achieve full consciousness without falling into the easy trap of uncritically accepting societal scripts. Topher earns his redemption in part by accessing his child-like curiosity, bolstering it with an adult sense of responsibility for the consequences of his choices and harnessing his intelligence to benefit humanity rather than satisfy purely selfish desires. Echo, the primary hero of the entire tale, exhibits a child-like wonder and curiosity about the world, shown in her desire to “be everything” (“Ghost”) and not limit herself (“Getting Closer”). She also possesses both the intelligence and moral accountability to harness the positive potential of a child’s flexible worldview to an adult’s sense of duty and accountability. Alpha, the most problematic character to redeem, exhibits intelligence and whimsy throughout the series, but seems to acquire morality in the form of Paul Ballard. In the case of this formerly violent and unstable criminal, resolution comes by integrating the morality of the traditional hero. Paul Ballard, the character most fitting the model of the traditional hero, the fairy tale knight or prince, forms a component of both Alpha and Echo but no longer exists as a separate entity by the show’s end (2.13). Even as a doll version of himself, his rigid consciousness (all duty, no play) is shown when he blurts out at the dinner table in Safe Haven that “the world still needs heroes” (“Epitaph Two: Return”), earning an awkward laugh from the others around him. This inability to change or adapt his nature may explain why this “hero” does not receive the traditional narrative reward for his efforts.

The show thus reasserts the need for mental flexibility in order to develop full consciousness. This same kind of open-mindedness might also allow an audience member to integrate the messages of the show itself, which both mimics and critiques the simplistic social scripting implicit in fairy tales (more on this below, par. 29-30).

[27] So what are the messages to take away from *Dollhouse*? First, as a show about sleep, consciousness, and the possibility of moral development, one of the implications of the show's use, revision, and critique of fairy tales is to read agency into the apparently passive. The show's explicit discussion of Sleeping Beauty describes how an imprisoned (sleeping) princess can dream up her rescuer; the sleeper is thus the constant of the fairy tale. In the absence of autonomy, the Actives find choices wherever possible: in avoiding their programming, in choosing whom they love, in choosing to integrate their experiences as Actives and their evolving doll selves into their overall consciousness and notions of self. These choices are usually circumscribed, but they are presented as real choices. Implicitly, then, the show acknowledges the potential for and limitations of choice within a social world complete with manipulated messages and suggests that those who are prepared to accept the consequences of their actions (by making choices) are the most morally complete. The acceptance of consequences and acquisition of morality allows the reconciliation of character and emergence of whole, coherent self because it completes the three-part consciousness comprised of self-awareness, intelligence, and morality.

[28] Also worth noting is that the show subtly critiques the broader societal gender norms of power by likening the powerful head of the L.A. Dollhouse to the masculine representative of the Dark Side, Darth Vader ("The Attic"), as well as the powerful religious figure Jesus (ibid). Only when it steps outside of fairy tale does the show have to masculinize Adelle DeWitt to express the enormity of her power; it is in our world that power is figured in ways which ignore women. In fact, critique of the limited ways in which people see each other was part of the show's genesis. Actor and Producer Eliza Dushku states in promotional footage on the DVD release of the first season that the show is like her life, in that it is about trying to figure out who you are among all the "should" voices—clearly the pressures of career and social roles. Writer/Producer Joss Whedon mentions that the show came

about in part because, in his opinion, Dushku has been typecast very narrowly, as is common for many performers and, he suggests, particularly so for young, attractive women. He also links the show to the politics of representation, mentioning in particular that, while he feels very comfortable being himself (an ambiguous formulation), his online avatar is the image of a beautiful, young Asian woman (Dushku and Whedon interview footage, "Making Dollhouse"). That he mentions this without explanation or complication, while intriguing, points also to the show's messages of self-realization and choice. Represent yourself, it seems to say. Choose your role. Do not limit yourself to following the voices of "should," at least without examining the content of those messages.

[29] Beyond the messages concerning fairy tales, the show conflates various forms of narrative, using urban legend, myth, and fairy tale interchangeably to describe the nature of the Dollhouse. Nowhere is this clearer than in "Man on the Street," in which the reporter employs all of these terms to delve into the significance of the Dollhouse story for "everyday Angelenos." In fact, this entire episode is about narrative—from Joel Mynor's tragic story about his wife's death and the fairy tale he tells about Ballard's search for Caroline, to the stories the interviewees tell about the Dollhouse and what their versions of the story reveal about their own personalities (their own fantasies of illicit affairs, their inability even to reveal a fantasy, their views of conspiracy theories and consumerist culture, their use of the Dollhouse and its technology as a comment upon humanity in general). This episode also overtly links folklore, in its logic and narrative structure, to television news without directing attention to this move. It thus relies upon an assumption that the audience will recognize this as a likely television news story or *type* of news story, pointing to the (increasing) slippage between categories of lived reality, allegedly informative and objective news reporting, and scripted television drama.² By drawing attention to the various sides of the debate concerning the Dollhouse and the appropriateness in general of the manipulation of another's consciousness—and to the common knowledge about the Dollhouse itself (which the audience knows to be half truths at best)—*Dollhouse* draws attention to the potential inaccuracies in *any* narrative. This may be particularly important when the

teller gives not only facts but an interpretation of them as well, as in the case of televised news reporting.³

[30] In doing this, *Dollhouse* asks the audience to internalize narratives, including its own fairy tale, *while* questioning and resisting them, a particularly interesting challenge when applied to the larger world. If we are to pay attention to the stories we're told and interpretations we're offered, what then do we make of the arbiters of fact and interpretation themselves, such as Whedon and the other storytellers of *Dollhouse*, or Whedon's employer, Fox Broadcasting, framers of the news? Like Rossum, Fox News—the most controversial and arguably the most influential of news agencies—collects information, controls its dispersal, and offers information to the public only with its own self-serving interpretation firmly attached. Even leaving aside the political ramifications of this meta-narrative implication, *Dollhouse* suggests that stories and storytellers are to be questioned, challenged, and adapted to our own purposes and needs because the stories they tell—all stories, and even moral claims without attached narrative—are laden with “programming” (unaired pilot “Echo”). And programming, as the show amply demonstrates, is a problem to be recognized, resisted, and ultimately overcome by forming ourselves, even against powerful systems and against all odds (as Boyd notes that Echo has done in “Getting Closer”). In the absence of an absolute truth, which the show never offers and suggests is not an available option, we are left to make our own interpretations, which is perhaps the surest sign of having achieved our own full consciousness.

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¹ Trauma and its relationships to memory, identity, and consciousness represent another central concern of the show and are deserving of considerable further scrutiny, especially in the character arcs of Priya/Sierra and Anthony/Victor.

² That television and print news are constructed as narrative is a widely accepted assumption in Communications and Cultural Studies,

stemming back at least to the early 1980s. On this point, see Schudson 97-112.

³ During a time of cultural crisis, such as the ongoing economic struggles of the United States, this is an especially crucial intervention, as recent studies demonstrate that an audience experiencing negative emotion or mood is more likely to accept news stories uncritically. For more on this, see Haigh, Brubaker, and Heresco as well as Malone.