# Intensely Original: Disrupting the Horizon of Expectations of "Beauty and the Beast" in *A Curse so Dark and Lonely*

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*The story of Beauty and her beast is truly a tale as old as time: a beautiful girl falls in love with a beast and her love transforms him into a prince. This project is framed by Joosen's (2011) argument regarding fairy tale retellings disrupting Jauss and Benzinger's (1970) claim that fairy tales and retellings align with the horizon of expectations. Using Kemmerer's A Curse so Dark and Lonely (2019), a "Beauty and the Beast" retelling, this essay tests Joosen's (2011) theory to determine if the retelling remains true to or diverges from the original parent material.*

The story of Beauty and the Beast is truly a tale as old as time: a beautiful girl falls in love with a beast and her love transforms him into a prince. The origins of this tale date back to "Cupid and Psyche" around 150 A.D by Roman writer, Apuleius (Griswold, 2004). For many centuries, the story has been repeatedly revisited, retold, and re-envisioned for many audiences. Arguably, the most well-known variant of the tale is de Beaumont's (1756) "La Belle et la Bête". After plucking a rose and encountering the beast's fury, the merchant must trade one of his daughters for retribution. Beauty willingly delivers herself to the beast's castle in exchange for her father's safety. During her time in the castle, she "tame[s] the beast" and "effect[s] the beast's transformation into a prince" (Derbyshire, 2017). Like its predecessors, "La Belle et la Bête" (de Beaumont, 1756) criticized the marriage system and the illusive "happily ever after." de Beaumont wanted Belle's story to inspire and "teach women […] that they have more value than just as a wife" (Derbyshire, 2017). Belle's humility and honesty won out in the end, and she earned her happily ever after with the prince in a marriage founded in love.

In each retelling, an aspect of the original "incorporates the critical and creative thinking of the producer and corresponds to changed demands and tastes of audiences" (Zipes, 1994, p. 9). Like fairy tales, young adult literature (YAL) was viewed as moralistic and didactic, classified as problem novels, or extensions of children's literature (Aronson, 2001; Daniels, 2006; Cart, 2008), but as the genre has evolved to include more diversity, it continues to take on more complex issues. As Donohoe (2019) details in her response to what makes YAL stand out:

> [Y]oung adult literature doesn't shy away from tough subjects such as mental health, LGBTQ, drug use, sex and pregnancy, bullying, death and terminal illness […] Because these issues are real. And experiencing these complexities of life vicariously through literature is a sincere way for the reader to gratify natural curiosities and fears. […] YA fiction can help readers identify common ground between themselves and characters, gaining comfort in the knowledge that, no matter their situation, they are not alone.

This shift situates YAL as a fertile field for authors to reimagine the fairy tale narratives. As Koning (2017) argues, "Young adult retellings […] challenge dominant social metanarratives […] because these tales, in some form or other, are generally already familiar to their audiences" (p. 4). Because YAL is open to not only addressing complex and controversial topics but embraces them, authors can explore the narratives and metanarratives the original fairy tales discuss and extend the messages to challenge the contemporary context of the retelling.

In a cursory search for retellings of the "tale as old as time," several curated lists and articles came up. Goodreads (2013) has a list with eighty-three YAL in which the "classic story of Beauty and the Beast is told in a new and interesting way." Calix (2015) documented ten popular titles utilizing the characters and/or plot from de Beaumont's (1756) tale. Some YAL titles are obvious such as Jay's (2013) *Of Beast and Beauty*, Dokey's (2008) *Belle: A Retelling of Beauty and the Beast*, and McKinley's (1993) *Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty & the Beast*, while others require a blurb to identify the retelling such as Maas' (2015) *A Court of Thorns and Roses* or Hodge's (2014) *Cruel Beauty*. Some of the more famous retellings, such as Napoli's (2004) *Beast* and Flinn's (2007) *Beastly*, offer the Beast's perspective on the fairy tale. More recently, Braswell (2016), as part of the "Twisted Tales" series, offers *As Old as Time*. In her reimagining, Belle's mother is responsible for cursing the beast. Together, Belle and the beast must work together to untangle the intricate story that connects their two families. The options for re-envisioning the tale are endless.

In 2019, Brigid Kemmerer took on the "Beauty and the Beast" narrative in her young adult "Cursebreakers" series: *A Curse so Dark and Lonely* (2019), *A Heart so Fierce and Broken* (2020), and *A Vow so Bold and Deadly* (2021). The series takes place in the cursed land of Emberfall where a vicious monster has destroyed the land and run the royal family from their castle, Ironrose. Like the traditional tale, the monster's only hope is to fall in love and have his love returned to break the curse. The spin: Prince Rhen, the last remaining heir to the throne of Emberfall, is the monster, and to keep from destroying what is left of his kingdom and remain human, Rhen must find love. Harper, the tenacious heroine of the tale, is a foreigner in Emberfall. Originally from Washington, D.C., she does not know what to do when thrust into the world of monsters, curses, and magic. Together, Rhen and Harper must overcome their own insecurities to create and maintain a united front as they take on the enchantress who initiated the curse. Kemmerer delivers "an intensely original retelling […] absolutely spellbinding … full of fierce new characters, wicked magic, and wonderous amounts of heart" (Garber, as qtd. on Kemmerer, 2019, Jacket). Set in the present social climate, this tale as old as time challenges both the representations of disabilities and toxic masculinity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This project is situated within two main concepts: (1) the comparative analysis employs Joosen's (2011) argument regarding fairy tale retellings disrupting Jauss and Benzinger's (1970) claim that fairy tales and retellings align with the horizon of expectations; and (2) the educational implications align with Luke's (2012) critical literacy approach in which texts can be used as tools to disrupt dominant narratives. Within critical literacy, I suggest implementation of Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone's (2014) Critical Literature Pedagogy as a tool for analyzing *A Curse so Dark and Lonely* to understand how it disrupts ableism and masculinity.

### *DISRUPTING THE HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS*

Jauss and Benzinger (1970) suggest stories, or literary works, are not new; rather they redispose "its readers to a very definite type of reception by textual strategies, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions (p. 12). As we read, the text "awakens memories of the familiar, stirs particular emotions in the reader and with its 'beginning' arouses expectations for the 'middle and end,' which can then be continued intact, changed, reoriented or even ironically fulfilled in the course of reading" (p. 12). When encountering a fairy tale retelling, readers assume the primary

gist of the story will remain intact. For example, Beaumont's "La Belle et la Bête" as mentioned above, we assume the storyline will include a female imprisoned by a monstrous beast, and through their interactions, it is revealed he has a heart of gold, they begin to fall in love, tragedy strikes, she flees then returns, saves the day, and they live happily ever after. Jauss and Benzinger (1970) refer to this premise as the horizon of expectation: the new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, changed, or just reproduced (p. 13). Fairy tales, often iterations of oral tales, follow the horizon of expectations making them easily shared and transferred.

Joosen (2011) challenges Jauss and Benzinger. First, she recognizes that traditional fairy tales, those that have been reproduced in "innumerable variants," align with the horizon of expectation. They are often one-dimensional, with flat characters, occurring in a traditional plot progression, ending with optimism, and are told in fixed-formula narrative styles by omniscient, third-person narrators (Joosen, 2011). Then, Joosen (2011) explores how retellings disrupt Jauss and Benzinger's (1970) horizon of expectations. She delineates seven aspects of disruption: *chronotope, attitude to the supernatural, characterization, optimism, action versus character development, style,* and *narratological features* (pp. 13-14). Each one explains how a retelling diverges from the horizon of expectations and paves its own path in the lineage of the tale. She points out although "a large number of fairy tale retellings problematize the traditional fairy tale, they are an important factor in its canonization process" (p. 17). Essentially, Joosen argues fairy tale retellings rejuvenate the traditional tale while identifying the problems within it.

## CRITICAL LITERACY

Pedagogically, this comparative analysis is housed in critical literacy, a critical framework for reading and engaging with literature. Though there is no finite definition of critical literacy, it can be used as a tool that is both "pleasurable and transformational as well as pedagogical and transgressive" (Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019, p. 300). Critical literacy can be traced to the theories of Freire (1972) and Freire and Macedo (1987). Reading and writing is indicative of how the reader and writer experience the world around them, as Freire and Macedo (1987) popularized in their concept of reading the world. Classrooms can be the entry point for change when the content and discussions are critically analyzing the socially constructed practices in which students engage every day. Across the scholarship regarding critical literacy, several key tenets arise

(Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019, p. 306). For the purposes of this project, the following tenets will be relevant:

1. Texts are socially constructed from particular perspectives; they are never neutral. All texts are created from a particular perspective with the intention of conveying particular messages. Texts work to have us think about and believe certain things in specific ways, and as such they work to position readers in certain ways. We therefore need to question the perspectives conveyed by the writer.

2. The ways we read text are never neutral. Each time we read, write, or create, we draw from our past experiences and understanding about how the world works. We therefore should also analyze our own readings of text and unpack the position(s) from which we engage in literacy work. […] we have to engage with texts on their own terms— both to learn from them and to critique them— and we have to recognize that our identities shape how we consume and produce texts.

3. Critical literacy involves making sense of the sociopolitical systems through which we live our lives and questioning these systems. This means critical literacy work needs to focus on social issues, including inequities of race, class, gender, or disability and the ways in which we use language and other semiotic resources to shape our understanding of these issues. The discourses we use to take up such issues work to shape how people are able to— or not able to— live their lives in more or less powerful ways.

4. Critical literacy practices can be transformative. They can contribute to changing inequitable ways of being and problematic social practices. This means students who engage in critical literacy from a young age are prepared 1) to make informed decisions regarding issues such as power and control, 2) to engage in the practice of democratic citizenship, and 3) to develop an ability to think and act ethically. As such, they would be better able to contribute to making the world a more equitable and socially just place. (pp. 306-307)

With these four aspects in mind – texts are socially constructed, we do not read neutrally, sense-making of sociopolitical systems, and critical literacy as transformative practice – reading and critiquing fairy tales and retellings allow for students to engage with literature in a meaningful and critical way.

To achieve these meaningful and critical engagements, I suggest Critical Literature Pedagogy (CLP), a pedagogical framework rooted in critical literacy that intends to teach readers of the high school canon how to effectively engage with a canonical text. While fairy tale retellings are not considered canonical literature, CLP offers a framework that allows teachers and students to critique the original tale and its retelling as they would a canonical piece. Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014) proposed CLP interweaves two ways of reading: reading with and against a text. To read with the text, instruction includes approaching the text through analyzing literary devices, meaning making, understanding historical contexts, and interpreting theme. Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014) agree that reading with the text meets most of the ELA state standards for state standards and testing; however, reading with the text does not encourage students to question the dominant ideologies. To combat this reading, they propose reading against the text to analyze how the text is entrenched in and influenced by the dominant ideologies. To read against the text, readers look beyond the words on the page to better understand how extratextual materials such as character function still accounts for how a reader understands the world. Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014) thus define reading against the text as: "reading between the lines to expose and interrupt embedded, dominant narratives, power dynamics, and perceived normalcy espoused by and hidden in the text, including its inclusion in school curricula" (p. 125). Through this type of readings, readers are challenged to question their own beliefs, values, and assumptions. Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014) emphasize that reading with and against the text are not asynchronous; instead, they occur synchronously. Reading against the text has the potential to strengthen the skills necessary for academic literacy.

CLP consists of five dimensions: canonicity, contexts, literary elements, reader, and assessments. To read with the text in canonicity means to consider the merit of the text (i.e. what critics say about the text and why it is important to read), while reading against the text means to challenge the text's prominence (i.e. why is the text canonical, who benefits from the text, and should it be read). Canonicity seeks to identify how canonical texts reinforce embedded values, how they have privileged certain voices over others, and emphasizes how readers read a text is just as important as what they are reading. It also aims to prove ideological neutrality does not exist in any text. Contexts recognize that many texts reinforce dominant historical narratives, some interrupt dominant historical narratives, and recognize the canon privileges White and male voices. Context also suggests presence of counternarratives illuminate dominant voices. Reading with the

text in this dimension identifies the context of the text (i.e., historical period and author's life experiences). Reading against the text identifies the counternarratives (i.e., how the text perpetuates or subverts a dominant ideology and questions perspective of the narrative). Literary elements pinpoint how canonical texts represent and situate marginalized populations and how themes in canonical texts underscore dominant ideologies. Identifying the literary elements and questioning how they contribute to universality align with reading with the text, while considering how the text reproduces dominant values and ideologies align with reading against the text. The reader as a dimension of literary study in CLP situates the reader as engaging with text and their own lived experiences (reading with the text) versus engaging with the text to question privilege and examine power (reading against the text). Reader as a dimension of literary study stresses that connecting to personal experiences undermines further exploration of power and different and highlights that when a reader is from the dominant culture, they tend to struggle to identify and challenge the dominant ideologies because as the privileged culture, the ideologies are invisible. Lastly, assessments as a dimension of literary study means connecting critical underpinnings across texts and transferring understandings to other forms of texts such as popular culture, media, and social media. Completing traditional literary analysis to interpret the narrative aligns with reading with the text. Giving readers opportunities to create and distribute critiques of normative behavior for real audiences aligns with reading against the text (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014).

## METHODOLOGY

As the literary analysis element of this article aims to understand how Kemmerer (2019 disrupts the traditional narrative of de Beaumont's (1756) "La Belle et la Bête," Sulzer, Thein, and Schmidt's (2018) Critical Comparative Content Analysis, or CCCA, allows for the basic comparison of the two pieces. Grounded in qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis, CCCA uses coding frames, emphasis on context, and surface level features to determine how the "presumed audience/reader" changes the text (p. 7). There are four stages in the CCCA process: *preparation*, *creation of the coding frame*, *coding the data*, and *establishing interpretations*. During the preparation stage, I read the narrative having already read Joosen's (2011) disruptions of the horizon of expectations. As the codes were already established in her article, I read with her seven disruptions as the coding frames: *chronotope*, *attitude to the supernatural*, *characterization*, *optimism*, *action*

*versus character development, style,* and *narratological features* (pp. 13-14). I sought out words, phrases, and situations that aligned with Joosen's argument. As I coded the data, I found that three main categories emerged (Saldaña, 2016) as key disruptions: *characterization, action versus character development,* and *narratological features.* The interpretations aimed to answer the following the research questions:

1. *How does* A Curse so Dark and Lonely *ascribe or diverge from the traditional fairy tale of "Beauty and the Beast?" Using verbiage from Joosen (2011), how does it disrupt the traditional tale?*

2. *Does* A Curse So Dark and Lonely*'s classification as young adult literature complicate the traditional fairy tale? How/how not?*

## FINDINGS

After close-reading and analysis, Kemmerer's "Beauty and the Beast" retelling does disrupt the narrative of Belle and Beast's story as outlined by Joosen's (2011) seven aspects of disruption. Kemmerer (2019) alters the *chronotope,* or location, by situating Harper and Rhen's tale in two settings, rather than one. She shifts the *attitude toward the supernatural* through Harper's initial reaction to the mystical setting of Emberfall and her multiple attempts to escape. Unlike Belle and Beast, Harper and Rhen's story does not end *full of optimism* for the future, but rather is dismayed and dejected as an impending war approaches the kingdom which shifts the optimism of the original tale to pessimism. Kemmerer complicated the *style* of the original by diverting from the fixed formula for fairy tales and extending Harper and Rhen's narrative over a three-book, full-length novel series. And while these disruptions do assist Kemmerer in situating the story in a more contemporary setting and style, her disruptions of *characterization, action vs. character development,* and *narratological features* establishes the novel as a tool for critical discourse regarding representations of disability, masculinity, and allows for analysis of first-person narration in supporting critical discourse.

### *CHARACTERIZATION*

The most notable disruption Kemmerer utilizes aligns with Joosen's (2011) characterization: fairy tale retellings psychologically develop characters and elaborate on protagonist's motives. Instead of relying on one perspective, like de Beaumont (1756), Kemmerer gives readers two perspectives: Rhen and Harper. Koss (2009) posits that the use of multiple perspectives allows readers to not

only hear multiple voices but emphasize how "each character will have a different set of beliefs, traits, and goals that impact his or her division over the course of the story" (p. 78). This affords the reader the ability to see the roundedness and complexity of both characters, and it reinforces the importance of agency.

### Rhen, Crown Prince of Emberfall and Monster, Harbinger of Destruction

Rhen's story does align with de Beaumont's (1756) Beast. He is cursed to be a monster unless he finds love. However, Rhen is human and morphs into a beast as a result of not finding love. In losing his humanity, he loses his faith, and his fear grows. Historically, male characters in fairy tales seem to "suffer less than their female counterparts" (Jorgenson, 2018, p. 342). Kemmerer disrupts this notion of masculinity in fairy tales. Throughout the novel, Rhen's torment, both physical and mental, far exceeds Harper's. Cursed to lose his humanity slowly and repeatedly, and thus maim and kill people in his kingdom, Rhen constantly suffers as he reflects on his actions and hides from society. The cyclical nature of Rhen's story intensifies his suffering and lessens his agency as he moves through each season.

Rhen reminisces on the early seasons following his curse. The goal of finding a bride seeming easy – his status as the crown-prince *should* easily lead to love. He would "specify blondes or brunettes. Big breasts, or long legs, or tiny waists. [He would] wine them and woo them and when they did not love [him] another was easily found" (Kemmerer, 2019, p. 3). He admits to Harper that when "'the curse began […] I thought undoing it would be simple […] but then … the creature destroyed my family […] I'd been so cavalier – and it ripped them apart without thought. I had no chance […] I can't undo any of it'" (p. 186). He further admits that he had attempted to kill himself to break the curse with no success. In his three hundred twenty-seventh season, the final season, his suffering is at his highest and agency is at its lowest.

However, this shifts when Harper arrives in Emberfall. Harper's presence is the catalyst for Rhen. She ignites within him a hope that shifts his attitude. While he is still moving toward transition into the monster, therein still suffering, his agency increases. Observing Harper, he recognizes that she is the answer to his curse. In her own actions within Emberfall, she inspires him to return to his people. He understands that with enemies destroying the outskirts of his land and with it the people in his kingdom he must show that not only is he alive, but he is willing to fight for them, as his "obligation is to the people of Emberfall" (p. 176). In the short time they spend together he sees that Harper may not help him save himself, "'but [he] may be able to save [his]

people'" (p. 196). As they work together to save Emberfall, Rhen's agency increases. He works alongside Harper and Grey to build an army, strengthen the ranks, and rebuild his and Emberfall's identity. Unlike Beast, Kemmerer exemplifies Rhen's suffering and his loss of agency through his first-person narration. Because de Beaumont's (1756) narrative is omniscient, readers are not afforded the opportunity to see Beast's inner development. That is the power of Kemmerer's (2019) disruption of characterization. We see the impact of Rhen's suffering and how interacting with Harper impacts his agency.

### *Harper, Pretend Princess of Disi and Real Person with Cerebral Palsy*

Harper's connection to her fairy tale predecessor is minimal. While she is from a poor family and a little sister, that is where the similarities end. Trites (1997) argues a strong female "protagonist is more aware of her own agency, more aware of her ability to assert her own personality and to enact her own decisions" (p. 6). Harper's strength lies in her agency. Throughout the narrative, Harper is fast-thinking and resolute. She is strong-willed and empowered and claims her disability as part of identity.

Almost immediately after her introduction, readers are informed that Harper has Cerebral Palsy, or CP, a neurological disorder that impacts a person's ability to move and maintain balance and posture (National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, 2020). Harper insists her "cerebral palsy doesn't mean my curiosity is broken" (Kemmerer, 2019, p. 8). This quick anecdotal phrase embodies Harper's development throughout the entire narrative. She is an insider and embraces her disability as part of her identity (Swain & French, 2000). A key aspect of the Affirmation/Identity Model of Disability (Swain & French, 2000), Harper shows no shame toward her CP, and when she shows frustration, she is open about it. Upon her arrival to Emberfall, Rhen questions "if Grey injured her [because of] the way she keeps her weight off her left leg" (Kemmerer, 2019, 11).

When the narration switches from Rhen to Harper, she mentions how her "left leg is clumsy and about to give way" but she "mentally threaten[s] to cut it off if it doesn't get" her out of the castle (p. 16). Later, as the impending fight grows closer, Rhen wonders if "the cerebral palsy will be an issue" for Harper. Grey responds no, it will instead, make the enemy easily "underestimate" Harper, as he and Grey did early in the story (p. 199). By referencing the enemy's underestimation, Kemmerer openly disrupts the ableist views by "recognizing the strengths and contributions of people with disabilities" (Hayden & Prince, 2020). Harper's characterization as a strong and

empowered woman and a person with a disability disrupts the traditional representation of Belle as a bookworm. She develops Harper to be a rounded and multidimensional heroine.

### Adolescence, a Liminal Space between Childhood and Adulthood

Reimagining "Beauty and the Beast" as a young adult novel complicates the original tale. As retellings are "altered, adapted, transformed, and tailored to fit new cultural contexts […] always doing cultural work, mapping out different developmental paths, assimilating new anxieties and desires" (Tatar, 2004, p 11), Kemmerer can intertwine cultural constructs into the varied perspectives of Rhen and Harper, both 18 years old. Kemmerer's depiction of two very different adolescents coming together with a shared desire – survival – empowers their voices and therein the voices of the readers. Rhen, a crown-prince, is cursed to perpetually relive his eighteenth year, the precipice between adolescence and emerging adulthood, while Harper is matured far beyond her years because of the situations she has experienced with her cerebral palsy, her mother's cancer, her father's illicit behavior, and her brother's need to follow in her father's footsteps. Petrone, Sarigianides, and Lewis (2015) argue adolescence is not a universal experience, but instead, it varies "widely and depend[s] heavily on individuals' positionalities and circumstances" (p. 509). Bringing together these two unlikely protagonists creates a space where Kemmerer can explore the power of lived experiences.

When discussing Youth Lens, or YL, characterization focuses on the behaviors, desires, and capabilities of the YAL characters (Petrone, Sarigianides, & Lewis, 2015). In Kemmerer's novel, there are very few adults present. Rhen, being the only member of the royal family still alive, is left with the responsibility of running a country. And because of the curse, he has shied away. The kingdom believes him to be dead. Although he believes his isolation to be what is best for those in his kingdom, he must come to the realization that by isolating himself, he has effectively abandoned them. Kemmerer forces Rhen to not only face the results of his decisions, but she positions him to learn from his decisions and rectify them. He must standup and accept his role as crown-prince and learn to embrace and wield the power that comes with it. Harper also must face her own desires as the novel progresses. In Washington, D.C., she is relegated to the sidelines as her brother takes responsibility for the livelihood of the family. When in Emberfall, she is thrust into a role of power and confidence. Though mature from the start, Harper must learn how to traverse her own identity and desires to return home and the responsibility she feels to the inhabitants of Emberfall. As the Princess of Desi, she has the power to make change and positively

influence other's lives. Kemmerer's use of adolescents as her protagonists allows the narrative to shift the focus from social expectations of marriage for females to the cultural expectations of adolescence and therein disrupts the assumption that adolescents are immature and irresponsible.

## *ACTION VS. CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND NARRATOLOGICAL FEATURES*

The traditional tale of "Beauty and the Beast," through third person narration, focuses solely on the action of the story leaving little to be known about Belle and Beast's character motivations. Joosen (2011) suggests "fairy tale retellings [shift] from action to characterization. The reader is given access to the inner lives of round and complex characters" (p. 15). To achieve this character-driven focus, retellings often disrupt the traditional narratological features such as the point of view of the story. Kemmerer (2019) disrupts the traditional tale by not only giving readers first-person narration, but she also provides readers to witness both the "internal and external perspectives of the characters in the novel (Keen, 2007, p. 93). Keen suggests that narrative situation evokes empathy in the reader as "an inside view should increase the chance of character identification" (p. 96). As readers encounter the inner life of the character, they are more likely to create a close relationship with the character; therefore, they are more likely to champion their story. In doing so, the readers are more invested in the characters than the action.

Kemmerer (2019) first introduces readers to Rhen in media res: "There is blood under my fingernails. I wonder how many of my people I've killed this time" (p. 1). As he recounts his final hour, the readers infer he is suffering. As argued earlier, Kemmerer disrupts the traditional concept that males in fairy tales suffer less than females with Rhen's painful lament in the first chapter. Much like the Beast, he is dark and brooding, wrought with self-loathing; however, Kemmerer's use of first-person narration invites the reader to sympathize/empathize with his pain as we learn of his plight. As we move through the novel, we witness Rhen's motivations transition from fear-driven isolation to hopeful action as he interacts with Harper. She challenges his perception of his situation. When they learn Emberfall may fall to Karis Luran, Harper pointedly asks Rhen "So what are you going to do about it?" (p. 154). From this moment on, Rhen looks at Harper as a sign of hope and forward progression. His development is emphasized through his interactions with her. When Harper discovers Rhen is the monster "that comes every season" (p. 348), he sends her back to Washington, D.C. which effectively "removes all hope" from his narrative (p. 349). For the duration of Rhen's chapters, he reverts to the hopeless man facing imminent death. Kemmerer

even goes as far as to remove Rhen completely and replace his perspective with the monster's perspective. In the last ninety pages, his narration is often blank pages or pages with fragmented sentences, such as "Harper? Pain. Sleep." (Kemmerer, 2019, p. 418). With his humanity gone, readers are left to hope, like Rhen, Harper has the strength to redeem him.

For Harper's development, Kemmerer's use of first-person narration allows readers to witness her transition from bystander to active participant. When we first encounter Harper, she is keeping watch for her brother until she sees a woman "collapsed in [a] man's arms like a marionette, her head flopped to the side" (p. 8), and because he's acting suspiciously, Harper decides to intervene and takes twice her size to protect the woman's life. From this point on, we recognize she is tenacious; she exudes sass and fierce determination. After immersing herself in Emberfall and taking on the identity of Princess Harper of Disi, she begins to develop into a more confident and active participant. Kemmerer includes many interactions with people within the kingdom that illustrate her power and confidence, but one of the most powerful moments in her development occurs as Rhen is being tortured by Lilith. He is "on his knees, one hand braced in the dirt […] spitting blood at the ground" (p. 227). Harper first runs toward Rhen which encourages Lilith to continue. She chides Harper for thinking he cannot withstand the pain, but Harper pleads that she stop. Instead of requesting her return to D. C., as was the original reason for Lilith's presence, Harper grabs one of Grey's throwing knives and throws it straight at Lilith missing her face but tearing her dress. In all his time with Lilith, Rhen has not truly stood up to her. He bends to her will. In her first interaction with Lilith, Harper initiates combat. Her transition from bystander to active participant is situated within the action of the plot. And while this scene also reveals Harper's weaknesses, Kemmerer emphasizes her strength and willingness to help whoever needs help. In the closing chapters of the story, we again see Harper and Lilith face off. As Rhen, the monster, lays on the ground, Lilith attempts to kill him. "I don't think," Harper narrates, "I leap at her. I leap at the sword. I don't know what I'm doing. I just can't watch him die" (pp. 465-466). In their first encounter, Harper is timid in her actions, but after experiencing everything in Emberfall and learning she is strong enough to be powerful, she willingly leaps in the way of a dagger. We understand her motivations for fighting for Rhen. We understand what led her to offer herself in place of him. This is only possible through Kemmerer's use of first-person narration.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, Kemmerer does a phenomenal job re-envisioning the traditional tale of "Beauty and the Beast." Her subtle nods and allusions to key images and moments afford readers the feeling of reliving a tale they have known while complicating it and giving it new meaning. Though all seven of Joosen's (2011) disruptions are present, the three main disruptions Kemmerer employs are characterization, action v. character development, and narratological features which allows the narrative to discuss and disrupt current cultural metanarratives in a space that readers are familiar. Giving voice to Rhen allows readers to see his complicated trajectory from scared boy in hiding to King of Emberfall. In the beginning of Rhen's narrative, he is timid and run by the monster. Because we can see his perspective, we are privy to his growth. We can see his transition from weak to strong. In terms of Harper, she is a strong female character from the onset. As we see her narrative unfold, we can watch her grow into her strength. While *A Curse So Dark and Lonely* is an action driven book – they are working to build an army against Karis Larun – the heart of the narrative is Rhen and Harper's individual trajectories and their partnership. Without the dual narration, we would not see those narratives.

Harper's narrative aligns with the traditional tale of Belle's journey, as she does return home only to discover that her heart remains with Rhen. Unlike her predecessor, her identity exceeds that of a heartbroken girl returning to her love. Instead, through her adventures with Rhen, Grey, Zo, and others in Emberfall, she developed relationships with people throughout the land. When she returns home to Jake and her mother, she is not content. She insists on returning to her people, her family. Her place as a bystander has long dissipated, and she has become a warrior. Despite everything pushing against her, she persevered. *A Curse so Dark and Lonely*'s classification as young adult literature encourages exploration of complex emotions in its characters. As a retelling of a "tale as old as time," Kemmerer breathes new life into the characters by using adolescents and their complexity to create an intensely original tale.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

This analysis focuses solely on the first novel in the "Cursebreakers" trilogy. To add to this research, it would be interesting to look at how Kemmerer (2019) continues to utilize and disrupt the "Beauty and the Beast" (de Beaumont, 1756) narrative or whether she diverges from it. In the

second novel, *A Heart so Fierce and Broken* (2020), Kemmerer changes the narrative voice to Grey and Lia Mara, a new character in the second novel. Though Rhen and Harper's voices are sparsely present, it is possible Grey and Lia Mara's story continues the Beauty and the Beast trajectory while disrupting different metanarratives. For *A Vow so Bold and Deadly* (2021), Rhen, Harper, Grey, and Lia Mara narrate the tale. It would be interesting to read the conclusion as a retelling of "Beauty and the Beast" considering the cast of characters.

As seen in the introduction, "Beauty and the Beast" is often revisited in the YAL genre. Because *A Curse so Dark and Lonely* is classified as fantasy, future research can be done to see how other fantasy adaptations can act as tools for disrupting metanarratives. Furthermore, as this is meant to employ CCCA (Sulzer, Thein, & Schmidt, 2018), expanding the subgenre of YAL from fantasy to science fiction, historical fiction, and contemporary realistic fiction and the fairy tale from just "Beauty and the Beast" may further illustrate how YAL authors utilize fairy tale narratives to disrupt a multitude of social constructions.

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