A colorful illustration of Belle from Disney's 'Beauty and the Beast' sitting on the ground, reaching out to touch the nose of the Beast. The Beast is a large, brown, lion-like creature with a mane, sitting on a large tree trunk. In the background, there is a large, ornate building with domes and minarets, resembling the Palace of Versailles. The scene is set in a lush, green garden with large red roses in the foreground.

*“Nursery fears made  
flesh and sinew”*

**The Work of Story, Embodied Intelligence  
& Feminine Transformation in Retellings  
of “Beauty and the Beast”**

**Abbey Dobbin [ad15zn@brocku.ca](mailto:ad15zn@brocku.ca)**

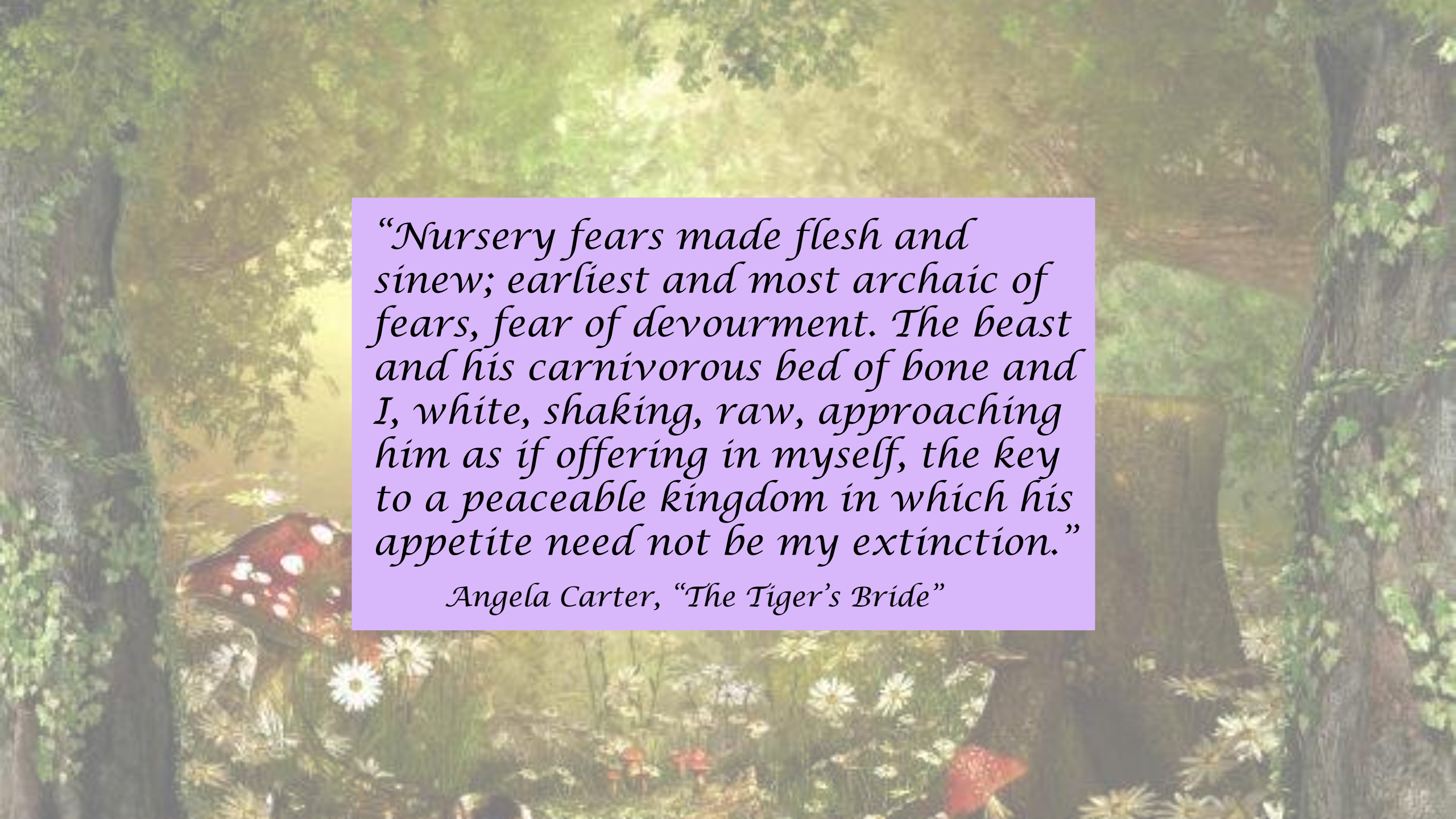
**Supervisor: Dr. Ann Howey**

**Second Reader: Dr. Barbara Seeber**

**2023 Brock University English  
Graduate Student Colloquium**

**April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**Sankey Chamber**

A lush, sun-dappled forest floor with large trees, mushrooms, and wildflowers. The scene is filled with green foliage, including ferns and various mushrooms, with sunlight filtering through the canopy. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

*“Nursery fears made flesh and sinew; earliest and most archaic of fears, fear of devourment. The beast and his carnivorous bed of bone and I, white, shaking, raw, approaching him as if offering in myself, the key to a peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be my extinction.”*

*Angela Carter, “The Tiger’s Bride”*

# TEXTS:

These three late twentieth-century short fiction, feminist fairy tale adaptations of “Beauty and the Beast” each take up the challenge of transformation in stories for young girls as well as sensual embodiment. They also include metanarrative qualities to explore the embodied expectations of retold tales in the fairy tale genre.



**“Beast” (2000)**  
**Francesca Lia**  
**Block**



**“The Tale of the**  
**Rose” (1997)**  
**Emma Donoghue**



**“The Tiger’s**  
**Bride” (1979)**  
**Angela Carter**

# TEXTUAL OVERVIEW:

**Angela Carter's Beauty** is gambled away to a beast disguised under a human mask by her father. She understands her own flesh as her greatest investment and intends to use it, but finds herself eventually, instead, covered in a “nascent patina of shining hairs” (75) and a deep sensual connection to the non-human.

**Francesca Lia Block's Beauty** must obey the inevitable consequences of her father plucking the forbidden rose. After some time in the animal domain, however, she only obeys her delicately concentrated bodily senses and ability to emotionally connect with her Beast.

**Emma Donoghue's Beauty** goes to the place where “the stories diverged” (32), the castle of the Beast to whom she has been promised. Through her character's transformation she learns the language of a new story of the Beast as a woman, and in the process writes a new one.

\*Each creates the space for the retold “Beauty” character to experience her body as part of a retold patriarchal, Anthropocentric story as well as through her constantly deepening, sensual, and more-than-human relationship with the “Beast”

# PROJECT OVERVIEW:

“Beauty and the Beast” is inherently a story about constriction, transformation, and connection. I propose a research project in order to explore the link between the transformative process of the tale over time and the narrativizing of the “other” as an embodied shift in the human understanding of non-human intelligence.

My choice of adaptations all take up the challenge of transformation between stories told to young women and “other” kinds of sensual embodiment. They also include qualities of metanarrative that allow me to explore the shift in expectations for retold tales. Each Beauty enters the Beast’s domain consentingly and deeply understand the narrative space of a young woman in a fairy tale, given the opportunity to step outside of it.

I explore the possibilities of looking past *sexuality* as the epitome and boundary of feminine empowerment and desire when examining Beauty’s embodied transformation as pleasurable as defined by *sensuality*.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Given each Beauty's shift from girlhood, threatened by the existence of the more-than-human, into the "othered" space of the animalistic embodied intelligence outside of its constraints, how can this study of how each space is narrativized to a young demographic represent the implications of the language employed to reflect these experiences?

In what ways does this transformation represent the shift in the human animal's understanding and narrativizing of the more-than-human's embodied sensual connectedness alongside conversations of feminine desire and empowerment in familiar stories?

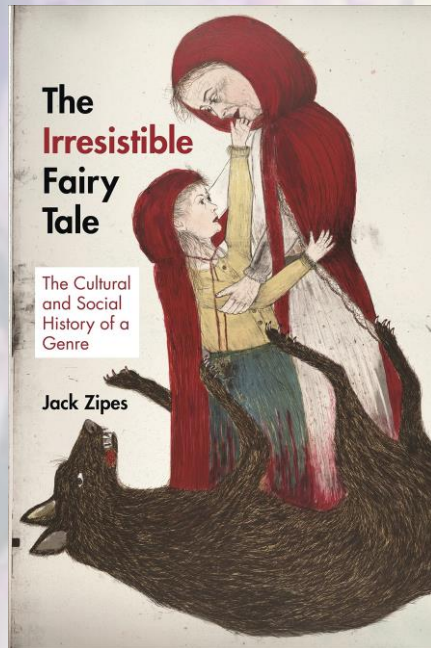
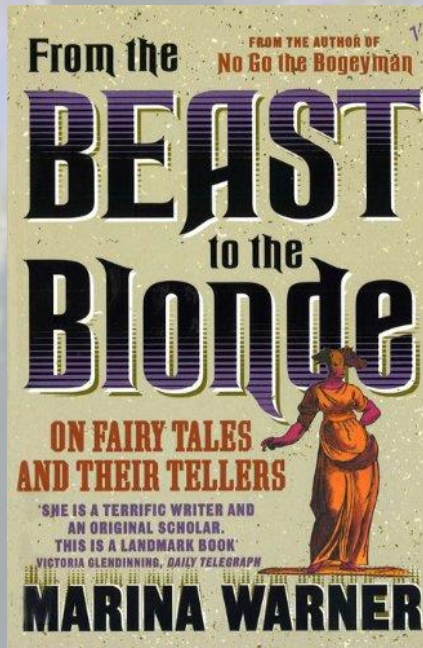
# METHODOLOGY:

My major research project will engage in a close reading of three contemporary “Beauty and the Beast” retellings in order to speak to their transformative awareness. In doing so, I will communicate with several theoretical texts that foreground their patriarchal and anthropological connections.

The focus of my project will remain on particular moments, including...

1. The earliest section of each story, when Beauty is somehow made aware of stories and expectations for female devourment
2. Metanarrative moments when the stories reflect on their status as retold tales
3. The descriptions of Beauty’s emotional connection to the Beast, and as such, the sensual and tactile relationship to the world around her
4. The final paragraph or so of each story when the transformation is represented in its finality – a sensual, physical, embodied, connected, and feminine experience

# LITERATURE REVIEW:

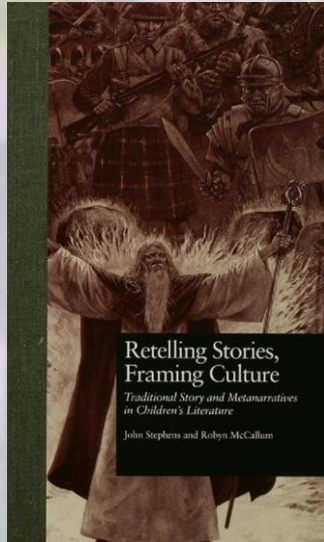
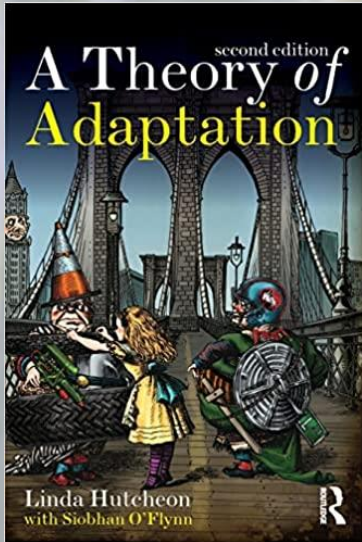


My project is located in the intersections of the studies of feminist adaptation, theories of embodiment, animal studies, and fairy tale scholarship. As such, I will rely on numerous texts to foreground my connection of these research areas.

Historical context for the earliest impacts inspired by the first iterations of “Beauty and the Beast” tales are explored by fairy tale scholars Marina Warner and Jack Zipes. These sources will help me to provide a grounding for the retold tale in order to understand the space where they have shifted from and are now able to explore through feminist adaptation and use of metanarrative.

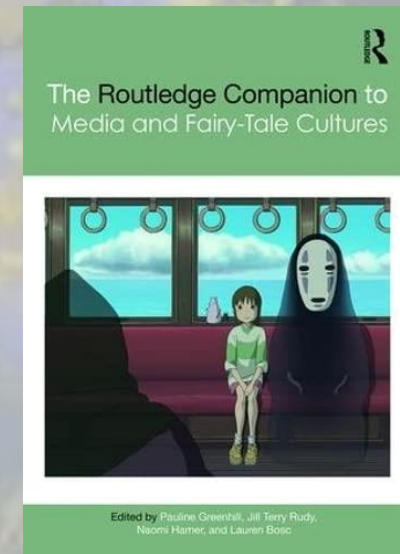
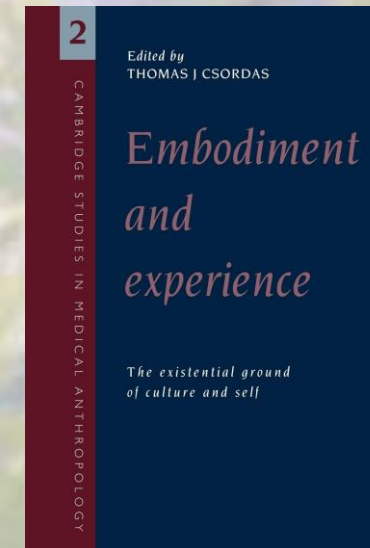
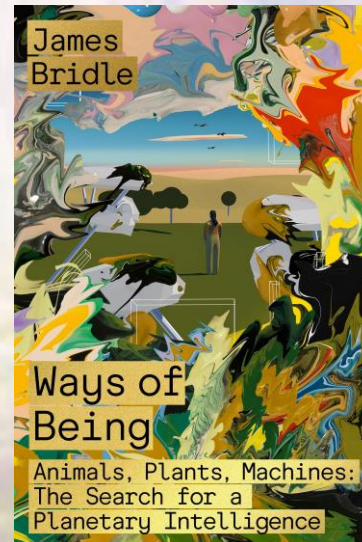


# LITERATURE REVIEW CONT'D:



< Literary theories of adaptation and metanarrative, influenced by Linda Hutcheon and John Stephens, will greatly assist the theoretical applications of tracking Beauty's move from a traditionally feminine space to that of a non-human sensuality within the chosen retellings and throughout the history of this tale.

> Essential to a shift in focus from intelligence of the singular mind to that of the connected body are texts that interrupt the relationship between the two. Bridle's conceptualization of collective, unconditional, and emergent intelligence is best exemplified when *between* creatures. My research is also indebted to these texts that interlace fairy tale, animal, and embodiment studies.



# IMPLICATIONS, MOVING FORWARD:

I intend to explore how the role of sensual transformation *within* each of these tales also represents the transformation *of* the “Beauty and the Beast” tale and in doing so, ask...

Why are fairy tales useful vehicles for trying on different versions of the same stories, shifting gender-based fears, and doing so by becoming aware of their own retelling?

To what extent do the feminist adaptations of fairy tales, and those aimed at a demographic of young adult readers, open up spaces not just to replicate themselves, but challenge their consequences?

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