By Maureen Sherbondy, 2012 Fall Conference Faculty Member, Poetry

Recently I opened my local newspaper to find an advertisement for *Wicked* , a musical about the witches of Oz. In another advertisement, Julia Roberts was starring in *Mirror, Mirror* , a movie about Snow White. It seems fairy tales appear everywhere—on television shows, in commercials, movies, and plays. An entire literary journal, *The Fairy Tale Review* , exists devoted to the subject of fairy tales. It is no wonder that these tales also creep into poetry.

For years, poets have employed fairy tales in poetry, transforming these tales, reinventing these familiar stories, and using the universal stories as a framework, a “trigger” as Richard Hugo would say. Fairy tales can be used in the same way that a poet might choose to incorporate a formal structure—for example, a villanelle—to control and set parameters in a poem.

I am intrigued by this treatment of fairy tales in poetry, using the familiar tales as a jumping-off point for new work. In fact, I wrote an entire book of these fairy tale poems (*After the Fairy Tale* , Main Street Rag, 2007).

We relate to fairy tale characters because we either fear them or strive to be them. They compose parts of the self. Archetypes appear again and again in tales: The Damsel in distress, the Trickster, the Hero, the Martyr, the Great Mother, the Crone, the Mentor, the Warrior, the Evil Stepmother, etc. Archetypes are universal connectors that create emotional responses, such as fear, desire, and hope. For example, in "Hansel and Gretel," the emotions range from rejection, fear, abandonment, to despair.

Tales rich in symbols also appeal to poets. Why not make use of archetypes and symbols that already appear in these tales? Why not extend the tales, change them, add to the vision?

When I first wrote my own fairy tale poems, I explored what happened after the fairy tale ended. I placed characters from “Snow White,” *Alice in Wonderland*, and “Sleeping Beauty” inside contemporary society to see what would happen when two worlds collided. For example, I set “Snow White” at a mall in the 21st Century:

Snow White at the Mall

They mistake her for the granddaughter
of the Sees Candies lady,
with that old-fashioned dress
edged in white frills, the bow
in her hair. Children with blue-cotton-
candy smiles point chocolate-smeared
fingers at her. Mothers steer them away.
Only the mall police return her Prozac grin.
She’s tempted by denim -
blue jeans and jackets at the Gap,
but fears the Prince might leave her
for dressing down. What can she barter
for merchandise anyway? A smile? A kiss? A poison comb?
Finding a penny she throws a two-for-the price-
of-one wish into the fountain: health and good fortune
for the dwarfs, a long marriage for herself.
She leaves the mall empty-handed except
for free pretzel samples, a Belk flyer with coupons,

and a blue helium balloon that lifts away
into the open, consumer-free sky.

Rich in symbolism, archetypes, and imagery, fairy tales are amusing stories to mine as a source for fresh (and fun!) poems. Universal stories with human and magical qualities, fairy tales can be triggers for new creative work. I hope that you will join me in the workshop I will lead at the Fall Conference to write your own original fairy tale poems.

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Maureen Sherbondy will lead a poetry workshop at the 2012 North Carolina Writers' Network Fall Conference. Her books are *After the Fairy Tale*, *Praying at Coffee Shops*, *The Slow Vanishing*, *Weary Blues*, and *Scar Girl*. She recently won the Spring Garden Press Robert Watson Poetry Award for *The Year of Dead Fathers*. The book will be published this summer. Her full-length collection, *Eulogy for an Imperfect Man*, is forthcoming from Brick Road Poetry Press. Her fiction has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She received an MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. Maureen lives in Raleigh with her three sons. Her website is www.maureensherbondy.com.